











# The Green Book

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for a cooing pair. The door closed after them ; no one noticing that there was a couple the less. In the middle of the little retreat was a round table. On giving this table a twist it sank, to come up again spread with tempting viands, among which champagne cooled in ice was not wanting.

Chevalier Galban smiled. So this was the idea. And to make it more secure they had shut the cat in with the mouse. Poor fools ! They think to catch a serpent in a mouse-trap ! Meanwhile, why not amuse himself ? The enemy must be allowed time to get into battle array. They believe him disposed of already ; and now, safe from his sharp eyes, the initiated will be betaking themselves to the place of meeting. But where is this place of meeting ? In what hidden portion of this mysterious building ? These, and like thoughts, rush through his brain. Tschirr ! a sound of shattered glass falling in a thousand pieces on the table.

"When I am by your side, I forbid you to think of anything else. When you can look into my eyes, do not stare out into the wide world. Or are you afraid of me ? Don't you drink ?"

Galban soon proved to her that he was not afraid of her, and that he did drink. Seizing the bottle, he drank. He may have had his reasons for thus drinking direct out of the bottle. No sleeping potion can be mixed with a bottle of champagne, for, once opened, it forces its way out ; while a drug can be easily conveyed into a glass.

Chevalier Galban's suspicion that they might seek to disarm him by means of a narcotic is the more easily explained in that he himself was carrying a similar medium in his waistcoat pocket, with the idea of ridding himself of any inconvenient obstacle did it come in his way.

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the wine as it melts, takes no harm.

Diabolka's wild abandonment suddenly seemed to give place to a certain exhaustion; her arms sank wearily to her side; she began to yawn; her head fell back. For an instant she pulled herself together as though shaking off the inertia. She must not sleep now when some great danger might be threatening without. She reached out her hand for the water-jug. But the potion had been too powerful. Going a step or two, she staggered; in the act of pressing her hand to her head, she fell into a deep sleep. "Chain up the bear," she stammered. She was already dreaming of the forest. Then she fell full length on to the ground.

Galban, lifting her on to the couch, pressed the spring. The secret door opened to his touch, and he found himself once more in the palm-grove. This was an amphitheatre, some six fathoms high, massed with the rarest palms from India and Senegal, which in an atmosphere of artificial heat and sunshine were being coaxed into flourishing in a land where winter reigns nine months in the year.

Hidden behind a giant cactus, Chevalier Galban peered into the adjacent apartment, intent upon discovering whether the men he had previously marked were taking part in the Eleusinian mysteries. None were visible. It was in truth a *masked* ball; the ball was the mask, but the chief masqueraders were no longer present.

Where were they then?

All had disappeared, even Pushkin, the head and front of the revels.

He resolved to go in search of them. It was a difficult and dangerous undertaking. It meant beginning a search in a vast place, utterly strange to

him, to which he had no clue ; it meant avoiding any he might meet, deceiving those who noticed him by simulated intoxication—a drunken man, not knowing whither he was going ; it meant the risk of being kicked out from intrusive disturbance of flirting couples. And even if at length he find the spot whither the conspirators had retired, it is only too probable that some sentinel would be told off to warn them of the approach of a suspected person. This watchman he must murder, pistol to breast ; for where a guard is necessary, a conspiracy lurks behind the portal. Then to force his way in—if the doors be closed, suspicion is well founded ; the palace doomed, and, if need be, razed to the last stone. If the doors stand open; then to enter with the words, "In the name of the Czar, you are my prisoners!" Possibly they may overpower him ; but far more likely they will not. A detected conspiracy is demoralizing ; to say, "If I do not return to Araktsieff by to-morrow morning, all who are here to night will fall into the hands of justice," will be to stagger them, and bring them to his feet. Moreover, it is his profession. One man dies in one way, one in another. The soldier knows the enemy will fire upon him, yet he goes forward ; the sailor knows the sea is treacherous, yet he trusts himself to it. One man bows his head to the executioner's axe, another bares his breast to the dagger. In both it is heroism.

And suppose he should find the missing guests round the board of green cloth, instead of round the "green book," staking their money at the prohibited roulette table? *Eh bien!* then he would join them, and say nothing to Araktsieff. It would not be a gentleman-like thing to tell upon them.

He was aided in his search by a sort of Ariadne clue, like that strewn sand which, according to the fable, served to guide the lost child out of the wood.

Zeneida had returned from the opera house in her costume as Semiramide, her wealth of reddish golden

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hair interwoven with real pearls. When Chevalier Galban, on her triumphal return to the palace, had assisted the *diva* to remove the bashlik from her head, he had, unseen and purposely, severed one of the strings of pearls in her hair. For a time her thick tresses might hold them together, but it was unlikely that in moving hither and thither one should not occasionally fall to the ground.

He had already picked up one in the palm-grove ; she had, therefore, passed that way. The second he found in a corridor ; a third betrayed to him the threshold of the apartments into which she had disappeared. Where she is, there must the others be.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE BOARD OF GREEN CLOTH AND THE GREEN BOOK.

THE room in which the "Confederation of the North" held its meetings was provided with double doors—a circumstance by no means uncommon in Russian palaces, in order that there should be no spying through keyholes, no listening at doors.

The centre of the room was taken up by a massive table, or rather a great chest, the upper part of which formed a roulette table.

The rolls of gold—probably sovereigns—(bank-notes are not used in roulette) are laid out in rows, beside which is placed the croupier's long scoop. Each new comer, as he enters, takes his seat at the table, and puts down his purse before him. But there is no play—in fact it is a mere sham. At each arrival, the opening of the outer door sets the table in motion, the noise of the rotatory ball calling the attention of those present to the fact that some one is coming. Thus there is no fear of surprises.

The introductions are performed by the lady of the house—a necessary ceremony, for on this occasion there are people who have never met before—accredited agents, representatives of secret societies which have been formed in the remotest corners of the Russian dominion. The president and keeper of the privy seal of the Northern Confederation is Prince Ghedimin; the secretary, Ryleieff, is a young poet, and agent of the American corn trade.

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Of the three brothers Turgenieff, Nicholas, the historian, is present ; as well as Colonel Lunin, the proprietor of the secret press ; Bestuseff, Kuchelbäcker, Commandant of Artillery. There are also Vaskofsky, Chief of the " Welfare Union," Muravieff, the representative of the " United Slavs," and Orloff, the life and soul of the " Patriots." All are distinct secret societies ; yet all are united in the one aim, " Freedom" —(Freedom under the Snow),—their mode of procedure, action, the instruments employed, wholly diverse. For this reason they have arranged the present meeting, in order to unite the various opposing plans into one common form of action. To this conference they have called the president of "the Southern Confederation," Colonel Pestel, from the far-off shores of the Black Sea, and the still more distant chief of the Caucasian " Barbarians," Jakuskin. But of all, he who has come from the remotest part (for he had had to wade through the sea of blood which separates the two countries) was the spokesman of the Polish " Kosinyery," Krizsanowski. All these men wear uniforms, save Ryleieff, who is of the burgher class, and who wears a modern blue frock coat with gold buttons ; all are beardless, with clean-shaven faces ; only the Pole preserves the national type ; and Jakuskin, whose shaggy eyebrows join his tousled beard, represents the wild Cossack, and seems, by his rough neglected exterior, to bid defiance to the civilized world.

There is something written on the foreheads of all these men.

Zeneida stands by the door to receive the new comers, until the room fills up. Conversation is not loud ; each seems to be conferring with the spirit which has led him hither.

The rolling of the roulette ball is heard yet again.

" Who can now be coming ? " asks Zeneida.

Pushkin appears on the threshold.

Zeneida's countenance involuntarily assumes an expression of alarm.

"Why do you come here?" she whispers excitedly to him.

"Is it not permitted?"

"Did I not commission you to watch Galban, that he might not take us by surprise?"

"I found a better guardian for him. Diabolka has got him in the mouse-trap."

"But your responsibility remains.

"I will go back as soon as I can do so without exciting attention. At present, I stay here. Introduce me!"

"What a child you are! Are you not consumed with curiosity to know what we are about here?"

"I wish to take my part in it."

"What wilfulness! Of course you imagine lives are going to be risked, and must needs stake yours for sake of the glory. Well, stay here. You shall see. Herr Pushkin!" And she turned her back upon him, as if in anger, whilst making the introduction.

Zeneida was the accredited agent of the whole union. Whom she invited to her palace was received as a "Brother;" to whom she confided any work was ranked among the "Men;" but to take part in secret conferences, and to be promoted to be a "Bojar" required a further recommendation.

"Who else stands security for him?" asked Prince Ghedimin.

"I," answered Ryleieff.

Upon which, room was at once made for Pushkin at the table.

His was a fine head. The curly hair and form of the nose recalled the African blood which ran in his veins; one of his forefathers having taken to wife a daughter of Hannibal, the negro slave promoted by Peter the Great to be a general. His eyes were dark and deep set, yet, despite the irregular features, one could trace in the expression a resemblance to Byron. Pushkin was in love with Zeneida; that is, he raved about her. Zeneida was deeply in love with Pushkin, therefore she did not want him really to love her.

A word will clear up this seeming paradox. Zeneida knew too well that he who united his fate to hers must inevitably meet some dark doom, in the background of which loomed the scaffold. Finland had been reduced to subjection by the same power against which these secret societies were waging war, and Zeneida could still remember her mother's tears, and the plain black coffin brought by stealth to her home one dark night, wherein lay the corpse of a headless man for whom they dared not even mourn. Only when she was grown up had she learned that that man was her father. She loved Pushkin far too dearly to lead him on that perilous path on which men risk their heads. She had dreamed of a happier, sunnier lot for him. She had long detected in the wild, restless youth that genius that had not been given to make him the lion of a lady's boudoir; a genius which belonged, not to Russia only, but to the whole world. A poet was not thus to be wasted. Why load the gun with a charge of diamonds when common lead would answer the purpose equally well, nay, better!

"Gentlemen," said Zeneida, addressing those assembled. "I will first request our brother Ryleieff to read to us the verses we are to spread among the people. To prepare the minds of the people is, indeed, the main object." (General applause.)

Ryleieff, the poet, a fair, slim, handsome young man, here rising, produced the verses he had written.

It was a fine, nobly conceived poem, perfectly rhythmical, and true to every rule of composition. The rhetorical warmth rising gradually to an impassioned climax, the under current expressing that deep spirit of yearning melancholy which harmonizes so entirely with the spirit of the people.

The poem recited, all united to congratulate the youthful Tyrtaeus; while Zeneida, with eyes filled with tears, kissed him on both cheeks.

Pushkin, annoyed, looked away. For a woman to kiss a man is the accepted custom in Russian society.

Ghedimin scarcely heeded Zeneida's action, and he certainly had the best right to demur ; but Pushkin was plainly annoyed by it. He envied Ryleieff : envied him the kiss ; how much more the poem which answered its purpose—*faute de mieux* !

"The verses are splendid!" exclaimed Prince Ghedimin. "We will have a million copies of them struck off in Lunin's press, and distributed amongst the peasants."

"You forget, Prince," put in Zeneida, "that our peasants cannot read. I would suggest it were more practical to have the poem set to music, that it might be diffused more rapidly among them. In that way it would pass from field to field ; mowers, reapers, waggoners would carry it from village to village, and what is once sung among them never dies out. In our Finnish *Volkslieder* has lived the history of the nation, the traditions of its historical life, its freedom. These, no man can take away. The '*Marseillaise*' alone raised an army in France."

"But to whom confide the setting of it to music?" asked the Prince.

"Here is Herr Pushkin," said Zeneida. "He composes charming melodies."

Pushkin felt as if stung by a tarantula.

He compose the melody to Ryleieff's song of freedom ! Subordination can be carried to a nicety of perfection. A state councillor, when he puts on the uniform of a private of volunteers, may find he has to obey the orders of his own chancery clerk and corporal ; or a duke, if he become a freemason, have to make obeisance to a bootmaker, as master of the lodge ; but for one poet to be called upon to write the music to another poet's effusion when he feels himself to be Cæsar, and the other man Pompey, is a sheer impossibility.

Pushkin's face crimsoned.

"To the best of my belief, the words and air of the '*Marseillaise*' were composed at one and the same time. Rouget de l'Isle wrote them together. Nor

can it be otherwise. The poet alone can find the fitting inspiration. Ryleieff's poem is fine, very fine, but it does not inflame and excite one. To such an end the fire of enthusiasm is a necessity." And unconsciously he slapped his breast, as though to say, "And it is here."

"Do you know, Pushkin," said Zeneida, "if you are really feeling the poetic ardour of which you speak—if you think you can compose something better than we have here, you could not do better than to retire into this little side chamber—there you will find piano and writing-table. Give us something better suited to our purpose!"

Pushkin was caught.

"Why not? I will write you a song which the peasant will not need to take first to the priest to have its meaning explained to him."

And with that he looked straight into Zeneida's eyes, with a look which said, "If you can bestow a kiss for Ryleieff's rhymes, what will you give me when I put on to paper the words that burn in my heart?"

Rising, he repaired to the inner room. Soon the sound of chords showed him to be deep in poetic creation. When once thus absorbed, a man does not lightly break off.

Zeneida had no better wish for him.

As Pushkin left the room, Zeneida turned the roulette board. The ball stopped at Nicholas Turgenieff. He was thus made President of the Council that day, and accordingly took the chair—made to resemble that of the banker of a roulette table.

And now, Prince Ghedimin, drawing out a delicate little polished key, which fitted into a keyhole revealed by pushing aside a brass button, handed it to the President, who turned it twice in the lock. Here-upon the copper slab, upon which the roulette board was fixed, slid to the other end of the long table, disclosing, in the part thus laid open, the "green book."

One single lamp hanging from the ceiling illuminated the figures of those sitting there, looking, by its light, like statues in a museum ; every feature seemed to gain in sharpness of outline ; their immobility lending character and determination to their faces ; so many historical subjects destined either to rise to eminence, the idols of the people, or to fall under the hand of the executioner. In those few moments, devoted to silent reflection, in which each man seemed to be engaged in studying his neighbour, many were looking upon the other for the first time, and appeared to be mentally comparing the reality with the ideal previously formed. The members of the Southern Confederation had never before met their Polish brother. Many of them had seen Jakuskin ten years ago, but then he was a merry youth with clean-shaven face. That has all disappeared. He is now a wild man of the woods, who only smiles when he speaks of murder. Leaning against the President's chair is Zenaida ; attitude and figure alike recall statues of the " Republic," only that instead of a dagger she holds a bouquet in her hand sent her by her rival. A dagger in disguise. Besides those we have already named, the following historical personages were present—The three brothers Bestuseff, Prince Trubetskoi Obolensky, Korsofski, Urbuseff, Pestel, Orloff, Konovitzin, Odojefski, Setkof, Sutsin, Battenkoff, Rostopschin, Rosen, Steinkal, Arsibuseff, Annenkoff, Oustofski, and Muravieff Apostol, all representatives of the many widespread secret societies.

Ryleieff, the secretary, opened the "green book."

The President desired him to read out the business done during the last sitting.

It concerned the working out of a plan of constitutional government for the whole Russian empire ; its title—"Ruskaja Pravda." It was a republic in which every province that the Russian despot had annexed to form one vast empire, was to arise as an independent state under its individual president—Great Russia, Little Russia, Finland, Poland, Livland,

Kasan, Siberia, the Crimea, the Caucasus; nine republics with their own government, and own army, under the control of one Directorate, to hold its sittings at Moscow.

The Republic needed no St. Petersburg. Neither the "Saint," nor the "Peter," nor the "burg" (city).

The device upon the plan was—

Question: "Will Europe in fifty years' time be Republican or Russian?"

Answer: "Both."

This plan of constitution was painted with the colours of a glowing fancy. First, to free every people, and then to unite all free peoples! None to be oppressed by the other. Each to be left to choose his own way to prosperity, speak his own tongue, cultivate his own land. No more hatred or jealousy among nations.

So it stood in the "green book."

Prince Ghedimin was the first to speak.

"It is a grand idea; but the greatest obstacle in the way of freeing the people is that the people are unconscious of their servitude. Let it be our part to make it clear to them. Let us flood the land with catechisms of the 'free man'; let us study the special grievances of every race in the provinces; learn to know their want and misery, and win them to the cause of freedom by promising them redress. A people suffers when it is hungry; when it has to submit to blows; its sons taken off to be soldiers; but it is ignorant of the yoke that is bowing down its neck."

Pestel waited impatiently until he could speak.

"My dear Prince, your plan may be very good for such as can afford to wait fifty years and build card houses, which fall to pieces at every current of air. We have not the time to devote to philosophical theories. We count upon the army and the aristocracy. The power once in our hands, we can take our measures to secure the education of the masses. A revolution left in their hands would lead to another Pugatsef revolt."

"And would that be a bad thing?" asked Jakuskin, in a hoarse voice, advancing to them from the corner where he was seated.

"It would be bad because there could be no organization. He who would carry out our scheme must be master of the situation. In Russia, the successful leader of an insurgent movement would only be another tyrant. Our scheme must be carried out simultaneously, at the word of command, throughout all Russia. No sooner that done than every secret society is abandoned, and we suppress all conspiracies; and hateful as is now the system of police detectives, it must, in future, be raised to an honourable calling. Every man of mind, every free man, and every patriot, must be proud to make himself a police agent of a free country. All this must come about at the stroke of a magic wand."

"And what do you propose to do under the stroke of the magic wand with the Czar and the Grand Dukes?" asked Jakuskin, with chilling irony.

"Make them prisoners, convey them on board a man-of-war, and ship them off to the new world."

"Humph! to the other world! In Charon's boat," hissed out the Caucasian soldier; and, going up to the table, he struck it with his clenched fist. "Hark ye, envoys of the North and South, members of your various virtuous and benevolent societies, you are all on a wrong tack; you deceive yourselves. There is but one answer to the question I put to you—scatter their ashes to the four winds. I am no puling child, such as you are. I have not covered two thousand versts to come here and hear you thresh out your philosophical theses; I am here to act."

Ryleieff here interrupted the speaker with quiet dignity.

"Quite right. But you will act as the majority decide."

At this call to order the vehement Caucasian's blood boiled within him.

"Once I was young like you, Ryleieff; but that is

long past. Once I too believed that one only needed to be a good man one's self to make the world better. I too had then as young and lovely a betrothed as you now have; I was an officer in the guards, and at twenty had distinguished myself in ten battles. And do you know what happened to me? The evening before my wedding-day, Araktseieff's son, a worthless fellow who did not even know how to buckle on his sword, and who had been made colonel over me, stole away my bride. I challenged him in mortal combat, and the dastardly coward, instead of accepting my challenge, denounced me to the Czar, and I was exiled to the Caucasus. As, with hell in my heart, I was taking my leave of the city, the last thing that met my eyes was the body of a drowned girl brought to me. It was my bride. I kissed her. I still feel the chill of that kiss upon my lips, and I shall feel it until the blood wipes it out, for which I long as keenly as any cannibal. When you are in Czarskoje Zelo look at a certain finely-painted battle-piece. Close behind the Czar you will see a youth on a rearing horse, a youth wielding his sword high in air, his face beaming with triumph and loyalty. That youth was I! Years have quenched my enthusiasm; but my sword still swings over his head."

"And so I trust it may remain, ever wielded on high, as in the picture!"

"But that it will not!" cried Jakuskin, vehemently. "I swear it by the devil they sent into my heart as its constant indweller, I will listen to naught else but my eternal vengeance! You may fill your 'green book' with resolutions—this is my determination!" And as he waved his arm aloft, he extracted a hidden dagger from his coat sleeve, and displayed its glittering surface to the company.

Horrified, Ryleieff, springing up, drew forth a pistol from a side-pocket, and levelled it at Jakuskin's breast.

"And I swear that I will shoot you down on the

spot if you venture to assert yourself against our rules."

"Very well, then, shoot me down! Fire away, boy!" growled Jakuskin, tearing open his coat and presenting his bare breast to the mouth of the pistol. "And learn from me how to die."

"Obey the rules, Jakuskin! Take back your word!" shouted several, as they rushed up to pacify the infuriated man.

"I will not withdraw it! You are cowards all! He shall fire!" he shouted back, roughly pushing them away.

"Gentlemen!" exclaimed Krizsanowski, the Pole, rising.

"Shoot me down!" roared Jakuskin, continuing to wave his dagger.

Then it was that Zeneida, drawing a hyacinth from her bouquet, aimed it at the raging man's forehead. And the seasoned man, who had never known what it was to shrink from a bullet, was so confused by this playful projectile that, letting fall the dagger from his hand, he put his hand to his brow.

A quiet smile passed over the faces of those present, and before the Caucasian could recover his dagger, Zeneida was beside him, had picked it up from the ground, restored it to him, and was stroking his beard with caressing action.

"Dear friend, be courteous! Our guest, Krizsanowski, the delegate of the Polish 'kosyniery,' wishes to speak. Let us listen to him, and put this shaving apparatus away!"

Jakuskin calmed down. This delicate woman had more than once stepped in to spread oil on the waves of the most impassioned debates when, dagger or pistol in hand, the disputants seemed bent on doing one another a violence.

And now Krizsanowski, hat in hand, began—

"Gentlemen, I wish to bid farewell to you. I will not enter upon the subject under discussion, nor

have I any desire to await the resolution arrived at. I will not listen to the question of murdering the Czar, still less will I submit to be bound by your decisions. There is not one among you who has endured such wrongs, not one among you who carries such grief in his heart as I. What did your sovereign, as its king, do with your country? He freed it from foreign conquest, made it great and powerful, added new territory to it. What did he do with your people? He gave them prosperity and knowledge, and erected a school in every one of your villages. What is your ruler? A noble mind in a noble body — 'the handsomest man in all Europe,' as Napoleon said of him—and with heart as good as he looks. And the most remarkable thing about him is that, in every fault, in every feeling, he is a Russian to the backbone. His only crime in your eyes is that he is the Czar. And to you that is crime enough to make him die. And what is my ruler, the Czar's brother, Constantine? A monster, in whose very face nature has curiously wedded the hideous with the ridiculous; and his hideous features are a true mirror of the hideous promptings of his soul. He is what he seems to be—cruel and contemptible. In the whole extent of my poor unhappy nation there is not one feeling heart which he has not trampled upon; no article of value, no relic, no Church money he has not appropriated to himself. But a Pole would see in that no cause to treacherously murder his king. A Pole's hand is accustomed to the sword; it knows not the use of a dagger. Let me take leave of you; I would go back to my people. I came hither in the belief that I should find here brave men ready for battle; who, at the appointed hour, would range themselves in fighting order, and declare war upon their oppressors as do we, who fight in open battle—as do we who, in open and honourable warfare, settle on whose side is the right. Such I thought to find here. On my journey hither, on the way from Warsaw to the Niemen, my predecessor, glorious Valerian

Lukasinski, was being conveyed before me—he whom treachery had given over to the authorities. He was my relative, friend, and leader—trebly dear to me. He had been subjected to every species of physical and mental torture in order to make him reveal the aims of, and participators in, the conspiracy. They had not succeeded in drawing a word out of him. Constantine himself took the knout from the executioner's hands, and taught him how to use the agonizing implement. When Lukasinski was well-nigh flayed to death, no sign of humanity left in him, only one mass of bleeding flesh and bones and gaping wounds, the viceroy had him laid bound on a gun-carriage, and this still breathing, bleeding mass was dragged to his captivity through the rigour of mid-winter. I followed his track, guided by the drops of blood which fell on to the snow. Those frozen drops I gathered up one by one on the way, and placed them in a reliquary. Heaven had compassion on the sufferer; he died on the road. They made a hole in the ice of the river Niemen, and threw the body in; the current carried it off to the sea. I know that I shall follow him, and that my end will be like his. Still that knowledge neither moves me through fear nor revengeful feeling to lie in ambush and murderously strike my ruler in the back at any time, when he may be sleeping, or kneeling in prayer! Our God was never a God of murder. The dagger which struck down Cæsar, but opened the door to Caligula and Heliogabalus. While William Tell told Gessler to his face, 'With this arrow I will kill you. Defend yourself as best you can!' I do likewise. When the time comes I will declare war upon my enemies, and if God is with me I shall destroy them; but as long as I do not feel myself strong enough to engage in open warfare, no oppression, no cruelty, and no fantastic ravings shall lead me by any untimely revolt, to draw the cord tighter, which I fain would loose. Your plans are untimely, unripe, without sufficient basis; they destroy, but do not

build up again. I know them, and will not unite our cause to yours. Let me go."

Pestel, seizing the Pole by the hand, held him back.

"You cannot go yet; you have learnt nothing of our intentions. What you have heard hitherto was only a weak, academical discussion. The words this madman said were only the ravings of his mad passion. I, too, do not inscribe upon my shield, 'Strew their ashes to the winds ;' not because my soul would shrink from it, but because such a dictum would scatter our several societies like shots among a flock of birds. The people themselves would turn against us. To the masses the prayer for Czar and Grand Dukes is a necessity, and were the priest ever to leave it out, they would hang him for a heretic. If I were to ask my soldiers, 'Do you want a republic ?' they would straightway answer, 'Yes, if the Czar commands.' We must begin at the beginning ; we must not startle any one. The first step is the difficulty ; the others will follow of themselves. Thus let us go back to the point where Jakuskin interrupted us. And you, Krizsanowski, resume your seat. The question is the removal of the Czar and Grand Dukes—their removal only. Let them go to America by all means. There Russia has noble possessions ; there they can reign. But to this end you Poles must lend us a helping hand. For what use would it be to us to ship off the three brothers, when the fourth, Constantine, who by fundamental law is next after Alexander in succession to the throne, remains at large in Warsaw ?"

"Let us clearly understand one another, Pestel," replied Krizsanowski. "We Poles have ever been, since our first existence as a nation, ready to shed our blood for the benefit of others. Tell me, what is to become of us if we succeed in freeing ourselves from the Romanoffs ?"

"Form Poland into a republic."

"But your Polish republic will still be a part of the vast Russian dominions, just as Livland and Little

Russia will be ; and over us there will still be some one—a chief, who is lord over the nine republics, although I know not what title or what amount of power he will possess. And I swear to you I do not wish for a freedom that shall be the downfall of my country."

The deep silence which ensued proved that the Pole had hit the right nail upon the head. There was an expression of uneasy conviction on all faces.

Then Nicholas Turgenieff, the president, rose to speak.

"Take comfort, Krizsanowski. The chief of the republic, he who will be head of the nine republics, will be no autocrat, no tyrant under any other name."

"What, then ?"

"That which he must of necessity be—*un président sans phrases.*"

The conversation had taken place in French. These four words had nearly cost Turgenieff his estates and his head.

The words were scarce spoken, when the roulette board suddenly slipped back into its place, effectually concealing the "green book," and the door opened. Copper plate and door were an ingeniously constructed piece of machinery. If the "green book" were exposed to view, and any one opened the outer door, the roulette slid back instantly into its place.

Chevalier Galban, entering, only heard Nicholas Turgenieff's four last words, and saw nothing but a gambling-table.

The banker repeated—

"*Je suis un président sans phrases. Messieurs, faites vos jeux !*"

One of the men playing—the Pole—rose from his seat with a disturbed look—

"*Merci, monsieurs, c'en était assez !*"

Another, Jakuskin, drying the sweat from his brow struck his hand on the table—

"*J'ai tout perdu !*"

All as if it were a real roulette table.

The others continued cold-bloodedly to lay their parcels of gold on the numbers, seeming unaware of the new-comer's arrival.

The hostess only advanced quickly to greet him.  
"I was certain that you would find out our den ; I kept this seat for you."

"You honour me too much, *diva*. I ought to have good luck in play to-night, as I have just had the opposite fate in love."

"How is that ? Did the pretty Gitanitza escape you ?"

"On the contrary, she fell asleep. A checkmate such as never happened to me before !"

Zeneida gave a merry laugh. No one could have divined under its mask the agitation she was feeling. She knew that a sleeping-draught had been given to Diabolka.

"Come along ! let us be partners for gain or loss." Chevalier Galban, accepting, took the seat allotted to him ; Zeneida seated herself on the arm of his chair

So it is a roulette table pure and simple, and the party assembled gamblers. There is no "green book." A thickness of half an inch lay between him and it—his arm rested on it.

Merely contravention of a police regulation—a thing winked at by the authorities. Suppressed inclinations will find a vent—far better it should be on moral than political domains. Nor is it any matter for wonder that Nicholas Turgenieff should be the roulette banker. A man may be a wit, a great author, philosopher, philanthropist, and yet have a passion for play. Even Napoleon was a gambler.

As the game was in full swing, Pushkin suddenly entered to them from a side room with flushed cheeks, crying in a tone of triumph—

"The song is ready."

The gamblers looked askance at him.

Now he would betray all.

Lucky for them all that his eyes had mechanically sought Zeneida's.

She, still sitting on the arm of Galban's chair, glanced significantly at the Chevalier.

Pushkin saw him.

"Let us hear it," said Galban, toying with his pile of gold pieces.

Pushkin changed colour for an instant as he stared at him, then plunged his hand into his breast pocket. All followed his movements anxiously. What would he bring out? Perhaps the song of freedom, just composed; and would he declaim or sing it, for Chevalier Galban's edification? Or would he draw that which every conspirator carried, dancing or drinking, a pointed stiletto to strike down the traitor then and there?

He drew out a packet of papers, smiling the while.

"Here is what I promised you, 'The Romance of the Lovely Gipsy Girl.' Shall I read it?"

A romance instead of a song of freedom? Why not? In order to cover an untimely appearance, the wisest thing for a poet to do was to read or recite something, no matter what, so that the others meanwhile could recover their self-possession.

But this was no mere rhyming jingle. No sooner had he begun than the attention of all was riveted on his verses. The poetic form was striking and brilliant, the thought original, the conception fine; there was fire, passion, audacity, and beauty of expression in it, united to a natural grace and simplicity.

No one had heard the lines before. As he finished, Zeneida, hurrying up to him, pressed both his hands in hers. She did not kiss him, as she had kissed Ryleieff, but the tears which flowed from her eyes were a higher recompense. A kiss is cheap. Tears are costly.

The whole company of conspirators, forgetting alike "green book" and reorganization, hastened to congratulate the poet, who suddenly, like a comet from before which the wind has chased the clouds, found himself revealed in all his glory.

Chevalier Galban was now convinced that this was

no gathering of conspirators, but merely a select assemblage who met for games of chance and intellectual and literary interchange of thought—both prohibited, it is true, in Russia—for which reason they were obliged to meet in secret.

Such verses would be public property in any other country, and half the world would be running after the poet.

“ Bah ! ” returned Pushkin, excited by the applause he had created. “ Do you not know that feebleness is the goddess we worship, and the priest of her altar is called the ‘ Censor ? ’ ”

General laughter broke out at these cutting words. The Censor is as stereotyped a marionette in Russia as in other countries. Galban seized the opportunity to bring his talents as *agent provocateur* into the field.

“ Yes, indeed, ladies and gentlemen, the Censor is a necessary evil among us. You are aware that the Czarina Catherine II. once, at the instance of her men of letters, commanded full freedom of the press in Russia for—three days ? It would be seen then what fruit the tree would bear. It would have been thought that those three days would have proved a harvest-time for songs of freedom, prohibited works, and philosophical treatises to crawl out of their hiding-places—but the result was only an avalanche of low slander and scurrilous anecdotes. The press was flooded with a stream of scandalous personalities, directed against well-known families and personages ; so that, already, on the second day of the freedom of the press, the Czarina was besieged with petitions to countermand the third day and reinstate the censure.”

No one save Pushkin deemed it advisable to accept the proffered challenge ; but he, as a poet, could not suffer the liberty of the press to be a mark for ridicule.

“ Come, I say, Galban, if I were to tell a man who had never tasted wine that he might drink what ran out from the bunghole of a cask the third day after

the vintage, that man would swear that there was no such disgusting stuff as wine in the world."

"*Messieurs, je suis un président sans phrases. Le dernier jeu !*" broke in the banker's voice, interrupting the dangerous turn the conversation had taken.

It was time, moreover, to finish the game; for if by five o'clock Chevalier Galban had not left the palace, the police would have broken open the doors, and every one in it have been arrested. The roulette was turned for the last time. Chevalier Galban had won six thousand four hundred roubles, which he gallantly shared with Zeneida. Then, with the customary forms of good society, he took his leave.

The remaining company looked at one another. Every one well knew that roulette was a mere farce among them. It was alike Zeneida's money which furnished bank and players. Hence the general smile which went round on Galban's winning a pile of his hostess's money, and then courteously sharing it with her.

But there was a glow of triumph on Zeneida's countenance, as, raising the bouquet with its diamond-set holder in her hand, she murmured in a tone of angry satisfaction—

"*Je le payais !*"

Chevalier Galban had received back the price of his diamonds, without ever suspecting that it had, so to speak, been thrown after him.

## CHAPTER X.

### FROM SCENT OF MUSK TO REEKING TAR.

WHEN those assembled were assured of Galban's departure, Pestel began—

“My lords and gentlemen, that was very fine—I mean the romance ; but it seems to me we have met to discuss other matters. Is it not so, Cousin Krizsanowski ?”

The Polish noble shrugged his shoulders.

“I have nothing more to say.” At the same time, drawing from his pocket the inevitable meerschaum and tobacco pouch, he slowly filled and lighted his pipe, which in the Eastern “language of tobacco” implies, “I should have plenty to say if I could only smoke out from here certain folk who seem to me suspicious.”

Zeneida, understanding his meaning, whispered something in Ryleieff’s ear.

“All right,” returned Ryleieff, “let us hear our Pushkin’s song of liberty. True, the fine romance you read us entitles us to name you our Tyrtæus. Never, since Byron——”

Pushkin did not allow him to finish the sentence. His praises excited him to fury. A schoolboy may win with pride the prize for the best verses, and carry it home in triumph to his parents, but your true poet cannot brook being praised to his face. He feels that he has constrained your praises. Thus, if you be a woman, throw him a flower ; if a man, give him a shake of the hand ; but never tell him face to face

that he has composed a fine poem; by so doing, you repel him. And worse than all is it for another poet to praise his work. "*Genus irritabile vatum.*"

"No, no, gentlemen!" he cried in wrathful voice. "My poem is not for your ears. It is not meant for musk-scented atmospheres, but for such as reek with tar and tobacco. Come, Jakuskin, let us go off to some beershop; that's the right place for it."

Springing up, Jakuskin held out his hand to him.

"All right, let us go to the 'Bear's Paw.'"

"Very well."

No one attempted to detain them. Between the two doors the rest of their conversation was heard.

"Shall we take Diabolka with us?" said Jakuskin.

"All right. Let's look for her."

"She must have fallen asleep somewhere. I will soon wake her to life again."

In this unceremonious fashion did the guests take their leave of their hostess. Zeneida, however, following them, left the room.

"Now you can talk out," exclaimed Pestel, hurriedly, to Krizsanowski. "Perhaps Zeneida's presence has hampered you. Have you anything to make known to us?"

"Yes," replied the Pole. "But it was not her presence which deterred me. Far from it. Women, when they are in a conspiracy, know well how to keep secrets. Laena bit out her tongue on the wheel of torture that she might not betray her colleagues. Ever since then the tongueless lioness has been the emblem of silence. Oh, I reckon greatly upon our women. I would even rather await Zeneida's return before speaking, were I assured that she would not bring back the other two with her."

"You mistrust them?"

"No, but I do not like them. In conspiracies it is not the absolute traitors who are the most to be feared. There are three classes I dread more—cowards, self-willed, and fantastic persons. The last is the most dangerous of all, for he deceives

himself, and reports falsely. If he hear a drunken peasant swear, he reports the existence of a revolutionary spirit ; if he see a solitary deserter, he distorts him into a whole regiment. He believes just what his fancy paints. If he has filled his head with revolutionary writings, he conceives himself to be a Robespierre, and every St. Petersburg mujik is a Paris *sans culotte* to him. To the working out of a conspiracy we want no fantastic notions ; but, on the contrary, common sense and judgment. With those two men, I prefer not to discuss matters ; the one is a fool, the other a poet."

Pestel hastily pulled the Pole's long-hanging sleeve.

"Do not affront Ryleieff," he said.

"Oh, Ryleieff is different. He can write any number of correct verses—faultless as to rhyme ; he measures his thoughts into iambics and trochaics, like a corn merchant does his wheat into bushels and sacks. He is master of his imagination—imagination does not master him."

Ryleieff was manager of the American Corn Company, and being, in truth, more business man than poet, received this doubtful compliment with an acquiescent smile.

The party, meanwhile, had risen from the table, and was standing about in little groups, awaiting Zeneida's return.

Ryleieff and Krizsanowski retired together into a corner. The Pole, smoking furiously, blew thick clouds of smoke about him, as though considering his rigid features a too transparent mask, likely to betray him. And in order not to be questioned, he began to question.

"There are one or two points I should be glad to have cleared up. The first spring of every great aim proceeds from selfish motives. Freedom—well, yes, is the sun ; private aims are earth. We are upon the earth. From mere abstract motives a new era has never been started. My private motives require no explanation ; they are expressed in two words—I

am a Pole. That is sufficient ground for me to stand upon. Fräulein Ilmarinen is a Finn. I take it that is sufficient reason for her action. I have no fear that she will be dazzled by the pinnacle she stands on, encircled with wreaths and diamonds. I can also understand your moving spring. You love your own race; you see how it has remained behind other nations, and would raise it to their level. Pestel's motives also I can grasp. He has immense ambition. He would fain be the head of a newly formed state. The basis is broad enough; his foot rests on a sure pedestal. The rest are shifting, unstable, attracted to the movement by the hope of playing some brilliant part in it. Then we have Apostle Muravieff. He, too, is constrained by a paternal heritage, from which he cannot free himself. Pushkin is in love with Zeneida; that, too, is sure ground enough. That madman Jakuskin is actuated by revenge; another safe passion on which one may rely. His sense of puritanical integrity binds that fine fellow Turgenieff to us. From earliest youth he has ever been in the advance-guard of freedom. Such iron rectitude can be recast in no other form, rather it would break than yield. Now there is but one man here whose presence I cannot understand, that is Duke Ghedimin. A member of one of the twelve old Russian dynastic families, his possessions so immense that he is simply unable to expend his yearly income on Russian soil, holding the highest grade at Court, himself an accomplished, brilliant, sought-after aristocrat, who by any changes you may effect has everything to lose, nothing to gain. What does he seek here? What is his interest in making himself one of this conspiracy?"

"He is the very one, among us all, who has the weightiest reason. The recollection of an irreconcilable affront, for it was a personal one. You know the Czar. You know that, as a man, no one is his enemy. Even Jakuskin merely hates in him the Czar, not the man. Duke Ghedimin is the

sole one who stands opposed to him, as man to man. The Czar was married very young, to a delicate wife; his children died early. He grew cold towards his wife, and sought compensation in a new passion. The only daughter of one of our first families, renowned far and wide for her great beauty, was willing to console him. The illicit connection had consequences—a daughter. The affair was kept strictly secret. The young duchess journeyed to Italy as an unmarried girl, and returned from there the same. Soon after she married Duke Ghedimin. Meanwhile a young girl was growing up in Italy who went by the name of Princess Sophie Narishkin, and who, in her fourteenth year, was brought to St. Petersburg. It was her father, not her mother, who brought her here. The girl resides in a house surrounded by garden in the outskirts of the capital, where her father visits her constantly, her mother never. The father worships the child, who, moreover, is terribly delicate. The mother simply hates her. Her father is the Czar, her mother, Princess Ghedimin. Now do you see what brings Prince Ghedimin among us?"

"Yes, yes. But does he know the secret of the girl's birth?"

"Know it? We all do."

"Still, no reason why the husband should. Think a moment. What human being is there who could go to a man like Prince Ghedimin, and breathe to him such a foul statement about his own wife? At the least whisper of such a slander an inferior would receive the knout, an equal be shot. A shopkeeper may denounce his wife; no gentleman does such a thing. Who could have made this known to Ghedimin?"

"Who other than his sweetheart! Is not Zeneida Prince Ghedimin's sweetheart, and has she not a thousand reasons to enlighten him upon his wife's shame?"

"Do not believe a word of it! She has not done

it. You do not know Fräulein Zeneida; I do. First of all, I do not believe she is Ghedimin's sweetheart; or, if she love him, it is with a real love, not that of a *Ninon de l'Enclos*. But my belief is that she is in love with some one else; and I believe, moreover, that she controls that love. She is a woman capable of defying the scorn of the whole world, but not of doing anything to merit her own self-contempt. And for a woman who loves a man to denounce his own wife to him is a piece of vileness only fit for the lowest of the low. You do not know with whom you have to deal. Zeneida is playing some far-seeing game with you. You are mere chessmen in her hands; one may be a castle, another a bishop, the third a knight. Possibly Ghedimin may be your king of chess, but she is not the queen. She is playing the game."

"And you have confidence enough in her to consent to this?"

"Yes; because I am her partner."

The roulette ball spun round. Some one was coming. All hurriedly returned to their places. Krizsanowski did not deserve the scornful smile with which Ryleieff had silently received his great utterance—for, indeed, it was a great utterance—"You others are only the chessmen; we two are the players." But so it was. The others only saw single moves; they two saw the whole game.

Krizsanowski had also plainly observed—although he made as if he saw nothing—with what painful anxiety Zeneida was moved to keep Pushkin away from the dangerous chess-board. Such a head is too costly for a "pawn"; perhaps too precious to be staked for a whole nation—the whole world—certainly in her estimation.

She had chased him away with incense, as if he were the evil one; now she had hastened after him to prevent his coming back. She knew that the heads of all those taking part in the conspiracy would fall prey to the executioner did it not succeed, and Pushkin's

must not be among them. And yet poets have their whims. Should Jakuskin on the way reveal anything of the fateful conference which had taken place round Zeneida's roulette table, the very charm of danger would bring Pushkin back. If he learnt that it was no mere academical discussion, but a council of war, which was being held, he would break open her doors to take his share in it.

Pushkin was still in the sulks. While Jakuskin hastened from one cabinet to another in search of Diabolka, he had thrown himself upon a sofa in the palm-grove, replying to all the blandishments of passing fair ones.

"Leave me alone. I don't want you."

"Nor me either?" asked a well-known voice, at sound of which another, fairer world seemed to open to him. And Zeneida, seating herself beside him on the couch asked, "Are you angry with me?"

"Confess. It was you who put Ryleieff up to insulting me?"

"In what way, dear friend?"

"I will not submit to be called Byron! I am Pushkin, or no one. Men may say that my verses are common Russian brandy which gets into the head, but no one shall presume to call them the dregs of an English teapot. I may be only a hillock, but I will not pose as a miniature Chimborazo. And it was your whisper to Ryleieff that did it."

"Yes; so it was."

"To drive me away?"

"To drive you away?"

"I am not worthy, then, to join the society of the Bojars!"

"What care I for the Bojars and the whole Szojusz Blagadenztoiga? I give them shelter—and that is enough."

"And am I not worthy to singe my wings in the fire of your eyes?"

"It would convert you to ice."

"Are you so cold, then?"

“Cold as the northern light.”

“Have you no heart?”

“According to anatomy I have such a thing; but it has other functions than those ascribed to it by poets. That of which you speak has, Gall tells us, its seat in the skull, in No. 27 portion of the brain, and is not developed in my organization.”

“Do not kill me with your phrenology. You know what love is,—”

“I know. The compact of a tyrant with a slave.”

“Be you the tyrant; I will be the slave.”

“With these words as many women have been deceived as there are grains of sand on the seashore.”

“I swear to you, my life, my very soul, are yours!”

“By whom do you swear? By Venus, so inconstant; by Allah, who denies that women have souls, and divides the heart of man in four parts; by Brahma, who burns the widow on the funereal pyre; or by the great Cosmos?”

“There is nothing so formidable as a woman who takes to philosophizing!”

“That is why I do so.”

“You kill every iota of poetry with it.”

“Then speak prose.”

“Well, then, I ask nothing of you—I give. I give you my soul, my hand, my name!”

“Ah, your name! That is a gift. A woman like me has diamonds, horses, houses, given her; but he who would offer her his name is indeed rare to meet with. And yet a name is the most precious ornament. Without such a name, I am a nobody. Were I to marry my groom of the chambers to-morrow, I should be a woman of respectability. My poor good Bogumil never dreams that in his fur-lined gloves, besides his own red hands, lies my reputation! So you would give me your name?—a name which, so far, has been written on nothing else than that of overdue bills and alehouse doors. You silly boy! Why people would not call me ‘Frau Pushkin,’ but you ‘Herr Ilmarinen.’ But once let your name be written

in the fiery letters of fame, instead of chalked on innkeepers' slates, would you then unite it to another whose every letter is besmeared with—”

“With calumny!” broke in Pushkin, vehemently.

“It is but just. There is nothing so bad that can be said of me, that I cannot fill in. I am selfish, unfeeling; I have no faith in religion, nor in honour. Both are sophistries, contradicting each other, according as the ethnographical relations change about. The only good is, what benefits mankind. Virtue is folly. The sole use of good men is to be the tools of their more clever fellows.”

“Do not say such things!” cried Pushkin. “When I hear you speak so, you seem to me as if you had smeared your face with hideous colours.”

Was it not her calling to do so?

Zeneida drew her wrap about her shoulders.

“You will not see me such as I am. I am sorry for it; but cannot deceive. Have you no eyes for the magnificence which surrounds me? Do you know whence it all comes? Would you have me forsake it all—for what?”

“For another world before whose splendour all you see around you must fall into dust. The world into which I would lead you is filled with more magnificent palaces even than yours, Zeneida. It is Paradise!”

“Find yourself another Eve. Did I love you, I should kill you with *my* jealousy; did I not love you, with *yours*. To-day with one, to-morrow with another, for my caprices are boundless. I know no law, no oath no shame. Go, save yourself from me! Now you are but ice, do not wait until you are aflame. I can be his only who loves me not!”

“Your words are mere falsehoods from beginning to end. You wish to drive me from you that I may not take part in the conspiracy! I am not worthy, in your eyes, to share the dangers my more distinguished friends are running. Let me go back to them!”

“What conspiracy?” exclaimed Zeneida, feigning

astonishment. "Our friends are now debating how to introduce the American form of 'Temperance Associations' into Russia, in order to put an end to the enormous consumption of brandy now going on. There is no talk of upsetting dynasties in my house. Do you suppose that the 'Court singer' of the Czar, the Court favourite, did she hear of any conspiracy against his Majesty, would not at once hasten to smooth her own way to a coronet by its disclosure?"

"A way marked out by the skulls of her best friends?"

"Well, yes."

"No. You would not do it."

"Who knows? I have no soul, and do not believe in the souls of others. I have no faith in a future world, therefore I use this world so that things may go well with me in it."

"And supposing it were to happen, for a change, that things did not go well with you?"

"Then I would give back to earth what is earth's. The fable of the Phoenix has a deep-seated meaning. When he feels that his plumage is worn out, he changes into ashes. Of all creatures man has the greatest right to decide the term of his life."

Pushkin sought in the face which knew so well how to keep its secrets what there was of truth in all this.

A sound of laughter and oaths behind the jasmine bush betokened the approach of some noisy revellers. Zeneida sprang up from Pushkin's side. Laying her hand upon his shoulder, she whispered to him in a voice made tender by deep feeling—

"Avoid me, and seek her who is worthy of you and truly loves you, your Muse, and be faithful to her!"

And, like a phantom, she disappeared.

Jakuskin came forcing his way through the jasmine bower, Diabolka with him.

"Come, let's be off to the Bear's Paw."

Pushkin sprang defiantly to his feet, and said with a laugh—

"By Jove! here is my Muse! Come along; we'll go where we are understood."

And the three made their noisy way through the still thronged ball-room.

It was Zeneida whose reappearance the whirling roulette ball had announced. A look from her told that the two had taken their departure.

Krizsanowski, removing the pipe from his mouth, put it in his pocket.

"Now we are among ourselves. Let us continue."

Pestel asked permission to speak.

"In order to disperse friend Krizsanowski's fears, let me first of all state that we look upon Jakuskin as a fool; and that not a man of us endorses his mad views of a *Cæsaricidium*; in fact, there is not a man among us who would not prevent it. Our plan is this: In the coming spring there is to be a great concentration of troops in the Government of Minsk. The ninth Army Corps will march to the fortress of Bobrinszk on the Beresina; the Czar and the Grand Dukes will themselves lead the manœuvres, returning at night to the fortress, which fortress will be guarded by the Saratoff regiment of infantry, the colonel of which, Bojar Sveikofsky, is a member of the 'Szojusz blagadenstoiga.' All the officers of the Saratoff regiment belong to our Union. At night a patrol of officers, disguised as privates, commanded by Apostol Muravieff and Corporal Bestuseff, will relieve the guard outside the Czar's pavilion. They will promptly take the Czar, the Grand Dukes, and Commandant Diebitsh prisoners, proclaim a constitution, institute a provisional government, and proceed straight-way, at the head of the whole Army Corps, on the road to Moscow. On their way they will gain over all the troops they come across. At news of their success Moscow will yield; and from thence St. Petersburg can be compelled to surrender. The men and officers of the fleet, anchored off Cronstadt, are fully informed of our plan. A man-of-war is in waiting to convey the entire Imperial family to

England. The revolution will be accomplished without the shedding of one drop of blood. What do you say to it, friend Krizsanowski?"

"That your plan is too complicated; has too much romance about it; and that the miscarriage of any minor detail would throw your whole reckoning into confusion. However, I do not look upon a successful issue as wholly impossible. The thing has already been achieved in Russia. Now, I will tell you what I bring, and which will serve to perfect your plan. Do you not agree with me that its success were highly problematical if, after the kidnapping of the Czar, a Czarevitch were remaining, who, by right of succession to the throne, could at the head of a whole army, enter Russia to test the power of a republican government by the loyalty of the people to throne and army?"

"That, in truth, is the rock on which we may be wrecked."

"Then, you may set yourselves at ease in that particular. I can promise you, my head in pledge of my words, that the Czarevitch will very shortly resign his rights of succession; and resign after a fashion which will make it impossible for him to recall the step, even did he himself desire to do so. Ay, even were he the sole remaining member of the Romanoff dynasty, and were the whole nation, senate, and peerage, to press him to ascend the throne, it would be an impossibility to him."

"And is this no romancing?" cried Ryleieff.

"No. Positive knowledge; psychological necessity; logical sequence."

"Devil take me! If that is not a greater riddle than the Sphynx!" growled Pestel.

"I have said what I know. Whether you like to believe it or not, is your affair."

So saying the Polish magnate rose, and thrust his pipe between his teeth, which was as much as to say, that he had said his say, and was intent on seeing that his pipe drew well.

But Zeneida, approaching him, whispered—

“ Is not the key to this riddle called ‘ Johanna ? ’ ”

A nervous contraction passed over his set face at the mention of the name.

“ If you have guessed it—tell it no further,” he muttered under his moustache.

“ I ? ”

“ True. You are the ‘ tongueless lioness ! ’ ” returned the Pole, with a smile.

\* \* \* \* \*

At that period lanterns were a luxury known but in few streets of the Imperial city ; and where a lantern did exist was posted a guard to watch that it was not stolen. Therefore in the courtyards of great palaces huge fires were blazing, in order to give light to the guests’ sledges, and that the jemsiks might protect themselves against the bitter night-cold. These fires gave out warmth and light at one and the same time.

With some difficulty Jakuskin found his sledge among the lines of others. Placing Diabolka between them, the two men wrapped her in their furs. She was too heedless ever to think of bringing her own. The jemsik, made loquacious by oft recurrence to his brandy bottle, told them that the distinguished gentleman who had driven the eight-in-hand into the courtyard, had but “ just gone off in his sledge ; and had given his man orders to drive to Araktseieff Palace.

That was a piece of intelligence worth having.

Jakuskin told his jemsik to drive to the Bear’s Paw.

“ Never fear, children,” returned the man ; “ I’ll drive you safely through side streets, that you may not be robbed.”

“ None of your side streets,” said Jakuskin, “ but just you drive along the Prospect and over the Fontanka Ringstrasse, where the patrols are. Don’t be afraid about us, my man ; we have our pistols.”

“ Ah, there’s no use in that, children. The robbers

might let you pass scot free when they saw your pistols ; but the guards have no fear of firearms, and they would plunder you."

And the jemsik was by no means joking. Under the police presidency not only the soldiers managed to slip out of barracks to act the light-fingered gentry, but the patrols shared in the spoil, and commissioners of police were the most reliable of accomplices. Great folk only ventured out at night with mounted escorts ; their palace-doors were strengthened with iron bars.

As they drove along the two men began scolding Diabolka for letting Chevalier Galban escape her, telling her how they had had to get rid of him at the cost of some thousands of roubles.

Just as the sledge turned off from the broad Prospect into Fontanka Ringstrasse, five armed men suddenly sprang out upon it. Two seized the horses' bridles, one levelled his weapon at the coachman's head, the two others fell upon the occupants of the sledge. All were armed with swords and pistols, their faces concealed by masks ; long sheepskins covered their persons from head to foot ; their tall, pointed fur-caps alone betraying them to be not only soldiers, but Grenadiers. One of them, speaking in French (consequently an officer), ejaculated—

*"La bourse ou la vie, messieurs!"*

On which Diabolka, suddenly springing up, jerked the pistol directed at Pushkin's head out of the assailant's hand, and, throwing both arms round his neck, began coaxingly—

"Come, come, sweetheart, cousin, would you plunder poor folk like us ? Don't you know us, then ? Look ! this is the brave Jakuskin, a captain on half-pay ; this, Pushkin, who has more creditors on his heels than kopecs in his pocket. I am Diabolka, who pays, and is paid, in kisses. Here are a few—on your cheeks, eyes, lips. There, take as many as there are room for. But if you are wise, and want to make money, there's a rich gentleman just now

on his way home to Araktseieff Palace, who has just pocketed thirteen thousand roubles at roulette. If you are quick you'll catch him up on the ice, crossing the Fontanka. He is wearing a red fox fur coat, trimmed with white bearskin."

Her words were as magic. With one accord the four thieves, deserting sledge and their leader, took to their heels in the direction of the Fontanka, as if they were possessed. The officer, too, seeing himself thus left alone, endeavoured to free himself from Diabolka's embrace. But that was not so easy.

"Stop! just one kiss on the tip of your nose."

Then he, too, was suffered to follow his companions. Diabolka laughed unrestrainedly.

"Ha, ha, ha! what good the consciousness of a meritorious action does one! They are safe to clear out Chevalier Galban."

"But you might have let the fellow off the last kiss," growled Jakuskin. "On the tip of his nose too. As though he could feel it through his mask."

"But those kisses were useful," returned the girl, with a sly wink. "While kissing him, I was spying what the dear youth was wearing upon his breast, and this is what I found." And she held up a star set with diamonds.

"Eh, the devil! Why it is a Vladimir order of the first class," exclaimed Jakuskin.

"Our Rinaldo is high up in the army."

"A Vladimir order set with brilliants! Eh, jemsik, hold hard, and strike a light. The names of owners, as a rule, are usually written in gold, inside the ribbons of the orders."

The jemsik, taking out his flint and steel, struck a light, and while Diabolka puffed at it with distended cheeks, the two men simultaneously read out the name engraven on the ribbon—"John Araktseieff."

"By Jove! The son of our trusty Araktseieff, too, plies the trade," cried Jakuskin.

"He is a known ne'er-do-well."

"Well, Diabolka, this is a fine catch! For this you may claim to-morrow every penny John has robbed over-night."

"And next day I should be as poor as ever," laughed the girl.

"If you chose, this order might make you John's wife—a real countess," put in Pushkin.

"What would be the good of that? In a week after I should be going back to the gipsies."

"Do you mean to expose him—to have him hung?"

"I am not such a fool; they would hang me beside him. Leave it to me. I know what to do with my prize."

Jakuskin said to Pushkin in German, that Diabolka might not understand—

"That man wrecked my whole life; and I had him at my pistol's mouth but now! But the ball is destined for another. You see, I did not even break out into fury when I read his name. When we are on the watch for bears we can afford to let foxes go. The huntsman's spear is on his neck. He is in Diabolka's clutches. Come, let us go to the Bear's Paw, and hear Germain's new effusion, 'The Song of the Knife.'"

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE HUNTED STAG.

NEXT morning the Office of the Great Fast was initiated in Isaac Cathedral by the Court singers—a celebrated choir of men and boys, who possessed the finest voices in the whole empire, and who were maintained at great cost.

Contemporary accounts extol these services beyond anything ever produced by human voices. In his riper years the Czar could endure no other music than the sound of harps and mystic sacred song. It was on that account that Zeneida Ilmarinen, the church singer, was so great a favourite of the Czar. He never went to a theatre. Did he desire music, his favourite artiste was commanded to the Winter Palace, or the Hermitage. During the fasts, however, he went daily to church to hear the boys sing.

On such occasions it was considered the correct thing by the aristocracy also to go to church; and in order to appear still more devotional, great ladies made a point of wearing no rouge, only powder.

In the row next the high altar sat Prince Ghedimin, Muravieff, Orloff, Trubetzkoi, all of whom had inscribed their names in the "green book"; after them, those officers of the Guards who had deliberated the previous night whether the Czar should die, or be merely banished. There they stood in two rows, erect, with military bearing, holding their drawn swords in their hands.

The heads of all were bowed so low, that perhaps

none remarked that the husband and wife, the rulers of all the Russias, only extended a finger to each other as they passed up the aisle, deigned no look at one another as the service proceeded, and exchanged no word together as they took the holy water.

Zeneida also was among the congregation. As she left church an officer bowed to her. It was Pushkin.

"Madame, you have been weeping—your cheeks are wet. Was *some one*, then, in church?"

"There is no *some one*," returned Zeneida; "but the music tells on one's nerves. We are but animals; even dogs howl when they hear music."

"Did you observe with what devotion the Czarina kissed the crucifix? Did you not know what was her petition?"

"I neither know, nor did I remark anything."

It was late before the church service had ended. The congregation quickly dispersed, and hastened home. The streets were deserted. On the first day of Lent every family man makes a point of supping at home. And as among the poorer classes in St. Petersburg only about every seventh man is blessed with a wife, others join together and get some female of their own class in life to prepare the lenten soup for them. This is seen on every table, rich and poor, whether in hardware vessel or delicate china tureen. Even upon the Czar's table it may not be absent; the imperial cook prepares it according to time-honoured recipe.

This soup every head of the family is expected to partake of in his own home. Time was when even in the Winter Palace the custom was observed. Time was! The table was laid for two covers only; no guests were invited. The many dishes, all prepared with oil and honey, were served for the two alone. Then came a day when the imperial wife awaited her husband in vain at the Lenten meal. He came not. And yet she waited and waited; the supper waited also. Some untoward circumstance had come between them. First the meats grew

cold, then their hearts. Yet all the same, year after year, the wife had two covers laid on the first evening in Lent, and waited on and on, the dishes untouched by the solitary woman. Hours would pass, the imperial wife sitting lonely, waiting, listening to the very slightest sound, wondering whether it were not her husband's footstep outside the tapestried door which connected the corridor of their apartments ; that door, at the opening of which her heart had formerly overflowed with earthly bliss. Alas ! now the lock had long grown stiff and rusty. Suddenly the clock began to strike—a mechanical clock which Araktseieff had had made in Paris. The piece it plays is the National Anthem ; it plays it but once in the twenty-four hours—at one o'clock in the morning—the hour at which Czar Paul had been murdered by his generals and nobles in his bed-chamber.

The son of the murdered man, who had ascended the throne over his father's dead body, had, at the turn of the year, listened for many an anniversary to the solemn strain, kneeling low, bedewing his *prie-dieu* with his tears ; and one being there was who fully shared the sorrow of his heart. With its every fibre that heart of his vibrated to the sad notes, a truer timepiece than the clock ; it attuned its notes to the triumphant strains of victory, as to the undertone of sadness when it reproached him that his father's corpse had been his stepping-stone to the throne, threatening that his body, likewise, should be the stepping-stone to his successor. This was the great trouble of his life ; the ever-present torture of his soul. To no one had he confided it, save to his wife. No one had ever comforted him in the hours of his agonized wrestling with that burden of grief, save his wife. Now that is all over. The soul-destroying blue eyes, in whose depths he had sought a new heaven, gave him for heaven—the cold, blue ether—separating earth from heaven for him. The Czar of all the Russias has no one in whom he can trust.

The mightiest of the mighty has no place where he may sleep in peace. The most forlorn pilgrim of the desert is not so utterly alone as is he.

When the last notes of the hymn have died away, and the husband, so long waited for, has not returned, the wife, rising, fetches a portrait of him painted upon ivory, and places it upon the table by the place he should have occupied. It is the portrait of a proud, heroic man, with smiling lip and unclouded brow—such as he was as a bridegroom. She gazes at it long, so long, her eyes filling with tears the while. Nothing is left to her of him but this portrait. He whom it represents has long ceased to smile.

Two sledges, already horsed, are drawn up before the colonnade of the Winter Palace. One is harnessed with six horses, the other with three. Both are closed carriages with drawn blinds. The coachman and footmen belonging to the six-in-hand wear the livery of the Czar ; those of the three-horsed sledge that of the Grand Duke. But, on getting into them, the Czar takes the Grand Duke's sledge, the Grand Duke that of the Czar ; and as they pass out of the gates, with jingling of bells, the one sledge turns to the right, the other to the left. The six-horsed sledge is followed by an escort of the guards ; where it halts, there halts the escort. The three-horsed sledge skims along the road unattended. It is known that the Grand Duke drives home direct ; he is a domesticated man. But of the Czar, none knows whither he will take his way in the course of the long night ; and nowadays it behoves one to be careful ; an escort has become a necessity !

Araktseieff had had a sharp tussle that very morning with Chulkin, Chief of Police, and the governor of the city, Miloradovics. There were three sets of police on active duty, military, civil, and secret police. And instead of playing into each other's hands, their sole study seemed to be for each to set the other's regulations at nought. Araktseieff was furious at

Chulkin because Chevalier Galban had been set upon and robbed the previous night, not only of his money, but of his papers—papers, among which were many important state secrets. To which Chulkin had retorted that the soldiers on patrol had been the thieves. Hereupon Araktseieff's wrath was turned upon Miloradovics, and he demanded that the officer in command, who had had the inspection on the night past, be sternly reprimanded for lack of supervision. To which the governor returned that the said officer in command was no other than young Araktseieff, his hopeful son. Hereupon Araktseieff waxed still more wroth ; but with whom ? He fully believed that his son had been Chevalier Galban's plunderer, well knowing him to be capable of the act.

He made no further official inquiry into the matter, merely adding that in future the Household Regiment of Hussars, under his own immediate command, were to accompany the Czar, at a distance, whenever he left the palace. No reliance, evidently, was to be placed on either infantry or police.

Araktseieff possessed a sure instinct which warned him of conspiracies against the Czar, even when he failed to obtain any certain clue. His was the sole and ever watchful eye that guarded the person of the Czar. He gathered upon his head the detestation of a whole nation in order to protect the head of the one man in whom his entire individuality was merged.

But the pursued knew how to elude protector as efficiently as pursuer. Whilst thus secretly escorted, the six-horsed sledge proceeded from barrack to barrack—the Grand Duke probably holding an inspection to satisfy himself that the officers on guard had not removed their tight stocks—the three-horsed sledge glided along the banks of the Moika Canal, drawing up, at length, before a long walled-in enclosure set with iron spikes. Alighting from his sledge, the Czar took from his breast-pocket a key, opened the gate, and entered unattended, the unlighted path marked by a line of oak trees. No footprint

was to be seen on the fresh fallen snow. The path was unused by any but himself. In among the trees with their crows' nests an old-fashioned house was visible, its wooden steps leading to a low oaken door. The solitary man has with him a key to this door also ; he opens it, and enters. Here it is so dark he has to take a lantern from his pocket in order to find the stairs leading to the story above. Having ascended the stairs, he proceeds on tiptoe down a long corridor. There is not even a dog to bark at him. As he opens a door, two persons, engaged in conversation, look round in startled fear. They are an old man and woman. The old woman screams ; the old man throws himself at the Czar's feet.

“Who is this man, Helenka?”

“My old man, my husband. Hold up your ugly pate, Ihnasko, that the Czar may see who you are.”

“You never told me you had a husband.”

“Why should one tell of the gout one is plagued with, or any other ugly thing one would rather forget ?”

“Well, what does he want here ?”

Here the old woman, covering half her mouth with her hand, whispers—

“He has brought the king's daughter.”

At these words the icy look melts from the Czar's severe features.

“What ! Bethsaba here ?”

“Yes ; and she is to stay the night. They are playing draughts together.”

“How is Sophie ?” The inquirer's voice falters.

“Fairly well. She slept well last night, and took her chocolate this morning. She has not been so cross as usual to-day, since the doctor told her that giving way to temper was bad for her.”

“Has she followed the doctor's directions ?”

“Rather too closely. If I am a second after time in giving her her medicine, she rings for me.”

“Did the doctor say anything about diet ?”

“Yes ; he said her Highness was not to observe the

fast, but to eat meat and eggs daily ; and that will strengthen her. But the Princess gave it him soundly. What was he thinking of? Did he mean to endanger her soul for sake of her body? And she has ordered me to pay no attention to what he said, and has threatened me with blows if I attempt to deceive her."

"Indeed! And the doctor said that the observance of strict fast would be injurious to her health?"

"Certainly. He said she wanted blood, she was anæmic, and that beans cooked in oil did not make blood."

"What have you prepared for her supper to-night?"

"The usual soup for the fast."

"Just oblige me, my good Helenka. I have brought something with me which will do our invalid good. I have had it over expressly from a celebrated physician in England. Give her a spoonful of it daily in her soup."

"Of course I will do what you command, sire. But tell me first, is it prepared from the flesh of any animal? For if the dear soul were to find out that I had mixed any meat preparation in her soup during the fast, she would cry and rage to that extent that she would make herself ill again."

"Do not be afraid, good Helenka. It is a remedy composed of palm-root, which takes the place of meat."

"And I shall not endanger my own soul by using it?"

"No, no ; have no fear. I will take all responsibility upon myself"

And yet were it an unpardonable sin to eat meat during Quadragesima, the Czar had laid a great burden upon his soul, for his remedy was no other than extract of beef, at that time the patent of an English chemist. But the Czar was a philosopher and—a father.

"Go in and tell her I am here, that she may not be startled at my coming."

By a lamp, whose light was tempered by a lace shade, sat two young girls playing draughts.

The one we have already seen at the memorable stag-hunt; and now we know her to be a "king's daughter."

As the Czar entered the Princess's room, and Ihnasko was alone with his wife, he could not refrain from asking—

"What did you mean by 'king's daughter'!"

"Slow coach! Don't you know that yet? She has lived the last eight years in your house without your knowing that she is the daughter of a Circassian king. Her father was once a mighty ruler there, where the currants and olives grow; he was killed by the Turks, and the Queen brought her crown and her little daughter, and fled to us for protection. She was a wonderfully handsome woman. I saw her once in all her national costume at a New Year's review. I did not wonder at what had happened. It was General Lazaroff who had received orders to bring her from her own country to Russia. The General was a man of amorous nature. On one occasion the wine he drunk flew to his head, and he forgot that he was escorting a queen, and only saw the lovely woman. But beautiful Circassian butterflies have stings as sharp as any bee. The Queen drove her kindzal into his heart, and he fell down dead at her feet. Not much was made of the affair; it was hushed up. The Queen was put into a convent, where she has always been treated with royal honours. But she is not allowed to leave it. Only on New Year's Day she takes her place with the widowed Queens of Imeretia and Mingrelia on the steps of the throne. As for her little six-year-old daughter, she was taken from her, that her royal mother might not teach her to follow her ways. Why, there would not be a man left in St. Petersburg! The child was entrusted to Princess Ghedimin's care, who has not the blessing of a child of her own."

"What child?" blurted out Ihnasko.

"Oh, you goose! What a question to ask! What child? None at all, seeing she hasn't got one."

Don't wink at me, or you'll get a cuff in the face. So the king's daughter was brought to Ghedimin Palace, and is now a member of the family. Forgetting her own mother, she looks upon the Princess as one."

"I should just like to know why the Princess sends her here to visit your sick princess?"

"That's nothing to you, you blockhead!"

\* \* \* \* \*

The other draught-player is Sophie Narishkin, a tall, delicate-looking girl with straw-coloured hair. It is well that she is kept in strict retirement, for, in face, she is the image of what Princess Ghedimin was at that age. There is an expression of premature wisdom in her countenance, blended with that of superstitious fear. Her eyes wear a softer look than those of her prototype; instead of Princess Ghedimin's haughty contemptuous expression, hers are dreamy and melancholy.

What can be the dreams of a maiden who knows nothing of the world? The world, peopled with mankind. She may dream of lovely landscapes, of rocks, woods, waterfalls. But of the beings who people the world she knows none save her nurse, to whose fairy tales she listens so eagerly, and her governesses, who have vainly striven to inculcate her into the sciences and fine arts.

All spoiled, no one loved her.

On every hand were traces of work or play, begun and left unfinished—draught-board, cards, chessmen, embroidery, drawings, patterns. She is sitting in a white embroidered dressing-gown, upon a wide divan, both feet drawn up under her. Beside her sits the Circassian princess on a low stool.

His Imperial Majesty is received ungraciously. Evidently he has interrupted the two girls in some amusement. And yet he seems to have the right to go up to Sophie and, taking her face between both hands, to imprint a hearty kiss upon her cheek—a

kiss, the traces of which the girl, with childlike coquetry, instantly tries to remove by means of the sleeve of her dress, which has the effect of making the offending cheek as red as a rose.

“How are you feeling, my Madonna?”

“Oh, now you have come and interrupted the lovely story Bethsaba was telling me!”

“She shall go on with it. I will listen too.”

“How can you, when you were not here at the beginning!”

“I know Bethsaba will not mind beginning it again.”

The Princess nodded in acquiescence, while Sophie, with a look, directed her father to take a seat at the other end of the divan. The Czar, understanding the glance, did as he was bid; and, taking one of the girl’s delicate, transparent hands in his, stroked it, and, as he did so, succeeded in feeling the pulse to assure himself that there was still hope for her. He wanted to put a question, but the delicately pencilled eyebrows commanded silence, and the Ruler of All the Russias was obedient.

“Once upon a time,” began the king’s daughter. “there lived on the Caspian Sea a mighty king who took a lovely woman to wife, not knowing, when he did so, that she was a fire-worshipper. Now fire-worshippers are in league with the Jinn (spirit), and the queen had promised the Jinn that if she married and bore a daughter she would give her to him when grown up. No sooner had the child become a maiden than the Jinn came and knocked at the king’s door to claim her. The poor king was terribly frightened when he was told that the spirit had come to fetch away his daughter——”

“If he was a king why could he not command the spirit to obey him?” broke in the sick girl, angrily.

“Ah, my dearest, the spirit is so powerful that no king can control him.”

“And no *emperor*?”

“No, not even emperor. No one has power over

him ; but he has power over every one. There is no locking him up or shutting him out, for he can penetrate everywhere. He has no material weight, yet can suffocate ; carries no sword, yet can kill."

"What a good thing that the spirits only live on the Caspian Sea!"

"When the king heard this, he began to entreat the spirit not to take his beloved daughter from him so soon ; to grant her to him yet another year. 'Very well,' said the spirit, 'I will leave you your daughter a year longer, if you will promise to give me your thumb in exchange.' The king, at the moment, cared nothing about his thumb, so promised, and the spirit took his departure. At the lapse of a year the spirit came again either to take the princess or the king's thumb. The king loved his daughter very dearly, but he also valued his thumb, for without it he would not be able to draw a bow. So again he entreated the spirit that he might grant her to him only one year more. 'Be it so,' returned the spirit, 'I will leave her to you another year, but then either I will take her away or you will give me your right hand.' And the king again closed the bargain. A year passed, and the spirit came a third time. The king would neither give up his child, nor would he part from his right hand. Thereupon the spirit demanded the king's whole arm as forfeit."

"But do the spirits never die?" asked Sophie.

"No, darling, the spirits live for ever. Well, the king promised him his arm—if by that means he might save his child—and his hand. And from year to year the spirit came back, demanding ever more and more as forfeit-money. At last he obtained promise of the king's head and heart. And when the king's whole body belonged to him, he said, 'This is the last year. Now I shall either carry off your daughter, or you must promise me your shadow.' Upon which the king replied, 'No ; I will give you no more. Take what is yours ; but neither my daughter nor my shadow shall you have.' Thereupon

the spirit left him, amid loud claps of thunder. The next day was fine and sunny, and the king set out for a pleasure sail upon the sea. Suddenly a violent storm arose, and engulfed both ship and king in the waves. The body was never found ; but his daughter still lived on ; and every evening, when the sun was going down, she saw a shadow draw near to her—the shadow of a man with a kingly crown upon his head ; and as the shadow glided past, it seemed to her as if she felt a kiss upon her cheek, and as if her cheek became rosy red."

The Czar had grown thoughtful. That king, whose shadow alone wandered upon the face of the earth, so mightily resembled him. And Sophie, too, thought herself like the king's daughter—kissed every evening by a royal shadow.

Bethsaba, however, added playfully, "We have many such legends with us. I could tell you more than a hundred."

"It is a very sad story, my dear child," said the Czar.

"I like stories that have a sad ending," said Princess Sophie. "Those that end, 'And if they are not dead, they are alive to this day,' I cannot endure. Books, to please me, must end badly ; but the doctor says I may not read. However, little Bethsie knows such a lot of nice stories."

"Have in your supper now. Are you not hungry ?"

"Oh, who wants to be always thinking of eating ? Besides, we are eating all day long." And Sophie pointed to a box of *bonbons*, from which a few had been taken.

"But you ought to eat nourishing things, to make you strong."

"Who says I am ill ? Give me my hand-mirror. Have I not colour enough ?"

"Yes, you have a good colour. You are really looking well to-day."

"Phew, phew !" she exclaimed, spitting twice behind her. "One should never tell anybody they look

well ; it is unlucky. Now let us lay the table for supper."

The mighty ruler was ready enough to act the lackey to the pale child with the weary eyes, upon whom his whole soul was concentrated. But, with the best of will, he did it awkwardly ; it was plain he was not learned in the art. And Sophie scolded him roundly.

" See how badly you are holding that plate ! Did one ever hear of placing the spoon betwixt knife and fork like that ? No, the salt must be turned out upon the table ; it is not to be put on the table in the salt-cellar ; for if the salt-cellar should happen to be upset, it is unlucky ! You must not stick in the point of the knife when you are cutting bread ! First make the sign of the Cross over it, or Heaven will be angry. To think that such a big man should be so clumsy ! "

Meanwhile Helenka had brought in the Lenten soup. Sophie tasted it, then laid her spoon down.

" There is something different about it. You have smuggled some meat into it. I will not eat it ! You want to deceive me ! You want to make me eat meat soup ! "

The Czar, tasting the soup, assured her that it had no taste of meat. But the sick girl, angry at the mere suspicion of being tricked, sent all away untouched, and vowed she would eat nothing but sweets. The Czar implored her not to spoil her digestion with such trash ; whereupon, bursting into tears, she complained that they would let her die of hunger. At length the Czar, sending for the Samovar, made tea with his own hands, and, breaking some biscuit into it, begged her to try that. And great was his joy when she said it was " very nice." She ate a whole biscuit ; dipped another in the tea, ate a piece of it, and gave the rest to the Czar for him to taste how good it was. Then, letting him take her upon his knee, she laid her head upon his shoulder, and seemed inclined to sleep. Presently she asked

to be carried to bed ; then, winding her fingers in the Czar's, said her evening prayer ; and when it came to "Amen," her virgin soul seemed to breathe itself away upon the Czar's lips.

She was the sole being in the world he could call his own ! Among his forty millions of subjects she alone belonged exclusively to him.

The Czar of All the Russias found many little things still to do for his sick child. There was a cushion to warm to be placed at her feet ; orange flower water to be prepared for her night draught. He pushed a branch of consecrated palm under her pillow to chase away bad dreams—he, a philosopher, believing in the efficacy of a consecrated palm branch ! But philosophy is of no account by the sick bed of one's child.

"Now, you go home," whispered Sophie ; "Bethsaba is to sleep with me. Good night. I know I shall have no bad dreams."

"Lay your hand upon my head, that I, too, may sleep well. Good night."

They called one another by no endearing names, though they knew that in the whole wide world they had no one but each other.

It was past midnight when the Czar went back to his sledge—too early to go home.

"Drive along Nevski-Prospect," said the Czar.

The coachman understood the command. Upon Nevski-Prospect there is a two-storied house with "Severin" upon the door. Here the coachman drew up. The windows of the first storey were lighted. On ringing the bell, men-servants with lamps promptly appeared, who led the great Czar to the master of the house. Herr Severin was a simple paper-maker and printer, carrying on his business with his sons and sons-in-law, who, with their families, lived here with him. Upon great festivals it was the Czar's custom to indulge himself for an hour or two with the sight of their simple family life and joys—such joys as were denied to him. The tiny children recite their verses to grandpapa, who rides them upon

his knee ; converting them into generals by dint of paper hats and wooden swords. The Czar has no such generals ! Then five or six of them, forming into a circle, dance round, and sing the story of the " Ashimashi Beggars," each striking up in a different key. No such choir does the Czar possess ! At supper every dish is so well cleared out, that it would be a puzzle to say what it had contained. Such a feast the Czar cannot give ! And supper over, the favourite game of " Clock and Hammer " is brought out. They play for high stakes—nuts ; and the stakes are eaten while the game is played. The Czar has no such serviceable coin !

So he sits among them until the little ones, growing sleepy, are carried off to bed by their nurses ; first kissing everybody—even the Czar. No such thing happens in the Winter Palace !

When all is over, the distinguished guest has a long talk with the old man over the good old times. He listens to all the joys and sorrows of his host's everyday life. The samovar is emptied and filled again. The Czar cannot tell what does him so much good—whether the tea, the cakes, or the good old man's integrity—his honest, straightforward spirit. No such tea does the Czar taste in his own house !

Without, on the snow-covered roads, gallop the escort of the Guards, while stealthy conspirators peer out from dark doorways, and look after the six-horsed sledge, pistol and knife in hand.

The hunted stag knows nothing of all this !

None may tell whither he has wandered through the long hours of the 'night ; nor who it is that so persistently tracks him.

## CHAPTER XII.

### HOW A FORTRESS WAS TAKEN.

“LOCK and bolt the doors, and see that you let no one in! To him who doubts that I am not at home, say I am dead!”

“And suppose it’s some one to bring you money?”

“There’s no man living who would do that.”

“And if it’s a love-letter?”

“Let him push it under the door; but don’t let him in! For it might prove to be some rascal of a creditor.”

Unnecessary to state that this dialogue took place between a young officer and his servant. It may however, be as well to add that the said young officer was Pushkin.

With heavy head and light pockets he had reached home in the small hours, and, dressed as he was, had thrown himself on his bed; feeling as if each individual hair in his head was being torn out by a devil with red-hot pincers.

Suddenly he was aroused from his uneasy slumbers by a hideous noise of scuffling and quarrelling in the street. A man beneath his windows, seemingly set upon by ruffians, was screaming loudly for help; and no one going to his aid. Why should they—when the police did not trouble themselves about private disturbances?

Pushkin could stand it no longer: going to his window, he breathed upon the frozen pane to clear

a space, and looked out. Two men were belabouring a third, who was vainly endeavouring to defend himself, his face covered with blood. One of his assailants gave a tug at the long beard, worn divided in the middle, plucking out a handful. That was too much for Pushkin ; the sight of such brutality made his blood boil. Snatching his dog-whip from the wall, he tore down into the street. In vain his man cried after him, "Don't open the door, sir ;" he was out like a shot, and, plunging into the middle of the trio, began laying his whip upon the two offenders right merrily, upon which they quickly took to their heels ; and Pushkin, raising in his arms the injured, groaning victim of their brutality, carried him into the house. Reaching his room, he sent for cold water and a basin, that the poor fellow might bathe his face. This the sufferer proceeded to do so effectually, that not only the vermillion dye stained the water deep red, but the beard, which was only stuck on, entirely disappeared from his face. Drying himself, he turned with a smile to Pushkin, drew out a folded paper from the sleeve of his caftan, and said—

"Very glad to have the opportunity of speaking to you again. Will you not pay me this little account?"

Then, for the first time, did Pushkin perceive that it was his most pressing creditor, the usurer Zsabakoff, who stood before him!

"How the devil did you come here?"

"Why, sir, you brought me in yourself."

His servant interposed—

"Didn't I tell you, sir, not to open the door?"

"But they were pulling out his beard."

"It was only stuck on," confessed Zsabakoff, with a grin.

"And the two men who were laying their sticks about you?"

"Are my two brothers-in-law. That was all a pre-arranged thing. I knew that you were too much a gentleman to see a man ill-treated before your very

door. There seemed no other way of getting at you."

Pushkin saw that he had been thoroughly sold, and that it was best to put a good face on it.

"Well, and what's your business?"

"Only humbly to ask you, sir, to pay this miserable one thousand roubles. You know how long they have been owing."

"Yes, I have already paid them twice over in interest."

"Ah, if it were my own money! But I had to borrow it, in order to lend it to you; and the horse-leech from whom I borrowed it has put on the screw each time you renewed it, so that I have had to pay him the same rate of interest that you have been paying me. And now he swears he will grant me no more time; that he will have the caftan off my back if I do not raise the thousand roubles. And here, in the depths of winter, shall I have to go about in shirt-sleeves, and my seven children—beautiful as angels—will have no bread! To pay your debts the very pillow from under their heads will be taken from them. I shall have nothing left; everything I had I have turned into money to satisfy those blood-sucking usurers; even my wife's last gown has been pawned in Apraxin-Dwor. What will become of me, miserable man that I am?" And the usurer wept like a water-spout.

"But I cannot help you," said Pushkin, irritably. "Where, the devil, am I to get the money from? I do not coin bank notes."

"When will you pay me?"

"I am no prophet."

"But what is a poor wretch like me to do, then?" said the usurer, trembling.

"County court me."

"Ah, dear kind sir, don't make a joke of it. I should only be thrown into prison for lending money to an officer in the army. Have pity on me! Nine people will pray daily for the welfare of your soul, if you will only pay me."

"Where am I to get the money from, if I have none?"

"Just reflect a little, sir. You have some wealthy aunts—one of them may make you her heir. There are no end of rich, beautiful princesses in St. Petersburg, who would be only too glad to help such a brave gentleman, did they but know that he was in temporary difficulty. I could tell you this moment of an excellent match—a good, handsome, well-behaved young lady, with half a million roubles for her dowry. I will undertake the affair for you, if you wish it. Then you have such a fine estate at Pleskow. There are plenty of honest bankers here who, not knowing that your property is confiscated by the Crown, would lend you money on it. A man who is rolling in gold would never miss it; and, of course, you would give him back his money when you got back your lands, and that would be sure to be the case when you have done some brave soldiering, and the Czar rewards you for it."

Pushkin held his sides with laughing as he listened to this view of his affairs.

Zsabakoff grew desperate at the way Pushkin took his suggestions.

"Do not make light of it, sir," cried he. "I assure you, it is a matter of life and death with me. If I have to go home like this to those angels who are crying out for bread, I will take a razor and cut their seven throats, then their mother's, and then my own. That I have made up my mind to. You depend, if you go on laughing at me, I will prepare you a comedy that will turn your laughter into something very different. A desperate man sticks at nothing. When you have it on your conscience that a father of seven hung himself, before your very eyes, upon your window-frame—"

"Try it," said Pushkin, laughing; "but be quick about it, for it's uncommonly late, and I want to go to sleep." And with these words he threw himself upon his camp-bedstead.

"Well, then, you shall see, before you have time to sleep."

And the money-lender, dragging a chair to the window, got on it, made a noose of his scarf, fastened it to the window-frame, passed his head through it, and kicked away the chair. And suddenly Pushkin saw his creditor struggling in the air, his eyes starting out of his head.

So then it was more than a joke! Springing from his bed, he snatched up his dagger to cut the noose; then saw that his would-be suicide was wearing a kind of cravat of stout leather under his shirt, which effectually prevented any possibility of strangulation. Furious at the deception, he threatened the man with a sound thrashing.

"Thrash as hard as you like, but pay. I would willingly sacrifice my life to get back my thousand roubles. Don't tell me you have no money. I know you have. Did you not pay back Nyemozzin, that shameless usurer, last week? He's a thorough horse-leech! Takes two hundred per cent. And yet you could pay him, though he held no written acknowledgment of yours."

"Just why I did pay him. It was a debt of honour."

Zsabakoff, as he heard this, took his I.O.U. and tore it into shreds.

"Now I have no written security either—and mine is a debt of honour!" he said, placing both hands in his girdle.

This was too much for Pushkin:

"Devil take you!" he cried. "Here is my pocket-book. What you find in it you may take."

And the money-lender did find something in it—a poem, called "The Gipsy Girl." He began to dance round with glee, now stopping, now starting off afresh, like a merry Cossack.

"Ho, ho, what a find! 'The Gipsy Girl.' Heaven bless you for it! I am off with it."

"Where?"

"To Severin. He was only just telling me how all the world of fashion was besieging his doors to know when Pushkin's poem of 'The Gipsy Girl,' that he had read at Fraulein Ilmarinen's, was coming out. He said he would give any amount for it. So my thousand roubles are safe. If I can, I will squeeze something more out of him, and honourably share the surplus with you. I kiss your hand, sir. Pardon any annoyance I may have caused you. Command me, when you are in want of more money. I shall be only too happy to be at your service."

The money-lender had said the half of this speech as he looked back on the threshold. Pushkin thought the man had gone mad. Angrily throwing himself back on his bed, he forbade his man-servant to admit the fellow again; then slept till noon. When he awoke, he rang for his man.

"That fellow came again, sir."

"But you did not let him in?"

"No. But he pushed this packet under the door. Shall I throw it into the fire, sir?"

"No. Give it me."

And, opening the packet, Pushkin found in it a copy of his romance, "The Gipsy Girl," two bank-notes for one hundred roubles each, and a letter from the publisher, Severin, informing him that he had bought his poem for twelve hundred roubles, of which he herewith enclosed two hundred, and had paid the rest to the person who brought the manuscript. He forwarded a copy to Pushkin, that he might obtain the necessary permission to publish.

It was a queer story; and especially that he should be making money for what he had merely scribbled down for his own amusement. Absurd! A gambler had more right to the accumulated gains of a gambling club than a man to extort money from the multitude for permission to read what he had written! An author's fee! Surely a hybrid betwixt the degrading and the ridiculous! Did it most savour of theft or deception—or was it but a loan?

These thoughts passed through Pushkin's head as he read the letter. Now he had to go to the Censor—he, a military man, to humiliate himself to a scurvy civil official, and acknowledge him to be his judge and superior! In all else the army has its own court-martial. Poetry is truly an unsavoury implement when it so demeans a smart officer to defer to a civilian. Pushkin decided to make this sacrifice to Apollo.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A CANNIBAL.

THE devourer of human flesh is called a cannibal, but what shall we call him who feeds upon the souls of men?—who breakfasts off flights of youthful imagination, dines off great thoughts, and sups on the heart's blood of genius—what shall we call such an one? A censor? A man who sits in judgment on the gods!

At that period there were certain especially renowned censors in St. Petersburg, at the head of whom was Magnitsky, Araktseieff's right hand, if one may use the word *right* to either of his hands.

Certain anecdotes which have gone the round about these men ensure them immortality.

Herr Sujukin revised Homer's "Iliad," made Venus into an irreproachable lady, and Mars an officer of unquestionable morality, and changed the capital letters of all the false gods into small type. Only Mars was permitted to retain the capital M out of respect to the Czar, who was also the god of war.

He struck out "unknown heaven" from the works of a poet, because there is but one heaven where the saints dwell; consequently, it is not unknown. From another, he struck out the passage, "I despise the world!" It is a treasonable offence to despise the world in which Czar and Grand Dukes, foreign rulers and their ministers, delight to dwell.

The love sonnets of a third, beginning: "Worshipped

being, creator of my bliss ! " the solitary word " being " alone found grace in the eyes of the arbitrary Censor. We may only " worship " Divinity ; there is but one Creator. " Bliss " is only to be known in eternity for such as have ended their lives as true Christians. Thus the invocation " being " was accounted fully sufficient for the lady of the poet's thoughts.

And this was the man to whose tender mercies Pushkin must perforce commit his poem ! Knocking at his door, he courteously requested for his poem the favour of perusal, which request was as courteously conceded, a holy Friday being the day appointed for the next interview.

Never yet had the youth looked forward to a meeting with his lady love so ardently as he did to this appointment. He knew his man, and that he should have a hard fight—for there was no forgetting the fact that though there were many censors, he had no choice among them. Each had his special province : one the press, another religion ; the third education, the fourth advertisements, the fifth theatrical programmes and announcements ; and, lastly, the sixth, poetry.

Herr Sujukin, who represented the earthly providence of poets, had exercised that function in Czar Paul's time. He was now an aged man, with perfectly bald pate, and, his face being clean-shaven, he looked for all the world like a death's head : only that this head-piece was still provided with every imaginable means of inflicting torture ; his contemptuous grimaces could galvanize the luckless poet standing before him ; and many an one felt a death sentence already passed as he encountered the glare of those little red eyes, fixed upon him from their wrinkled sockets.

" Well, dear son Pushkin ! " Every poet was " son " to him. " I have read your papers through from beginning to end. I am truly sorry for you. What has induced you to mix with the lower orders, and select a pack of gipsies for the subject of your

poetical labours? Have you no higher associates? Are you desirous to bring shame on your noble father by this versifying of gipsydom?"

Here Pushkin calmed him by informing him that his father was dead long ago—which, be it known, was not strictly in accordance with the truth; but it is not necessary to tell the truth to a censor.

"Then you have certainly noble relatives who will feel ashamed as they read these lines! Why, they will think you have become a gipsy yourself! Now, if you had at least idealized gipsy life! But you have drawn them true to nature, thus sinning against the first rules of poetry. Nor is this your grossest fault. In the name of all the poets, what sort of versification is this? The like I have never come across before! Virgilius Mars wrote in hexameters; Horatius Flaccus in alcaic, sapphoistic, and anapestic verse. But what do you call yours? There is no rhythm, the lines rhyme in all directions, as if the smith had three hammers working together on his anvil; one line is too long, another too short! That I could not allow; where I have found a line too short I have lengthened it with an interjection." And the death's head beamed with self-satisfaction. "Yes, yes, my son, I have helped out many a poet. Derzhavin owes the greater part of his fame to me; and I shall make something of you yet!"

"All right, make what you like out of me—but not one iota do you add to my verses! Your office is to cut out what does not please you."

"Now, don't flare up, my child. You will have no need to complain of want of cutting. Do you see this red pencil in my hand? It is historical. It has never been pointed; that is done effectually by the constant striking out it performs. Since the year 1796—before you were born—I have been engaged, with this very pencil, striking out words, lines, ay, whole pages! And what it has struck out, has been condemned to eternal death?"

"By Jove! that pencil, then, is a very guillotine?"

" Eh, eh, a young man such as you should not pronounce the word ' guillotine ! ' This red lead, my son, preserves society from degeneration, conspiracies, epidemics. It is more precious than the philosopher's stone ; more powerful than a marshal's staff. It is the pillar on which rests the peace of the whole land."

" Just let me hear what miracles your enchanted wand has effected on my poor verses ? "

" It has done its duty. Do you suppose that lines like : ' Men enclosed within narrow walls are ashamed to love one another ' may see the light. Hump ! to love in the sense of your fine heroes, one might well be ashamed ! Running after gipsy girls, without the sanction of a priest, without wedlock—all unfettered—a pretty incentive to the young who would read it ! " . . .

" But, my dear sir, that is not my intention. As the dramatic development proceeds, I purpose to show up my hero's wrong-doing, for which he has to atone."

The death's head was discomfited. He was not prepared for this reply.

" Oh, so they are the adventurer's opinions ? Then you should have made a foot-note stating that they are not the author's views, and that the offender will atone for them later on. But listen again : ' He (that is, the citizen) basely sells, his freedom ; bows his head to the dust before his fetish, and by his importunity wrests from it gold and fetters ! ' Now, is it permissible to put this in black and white ? What ' freedom ' does he sell ? and to whom does he sell it ? No one in Russia has freedom ; consequently neither can he sell it to any one ! It is a revolutionary appeal. An incitement to anarchy ! A proclamation ! And then, ' bows his head to the dust before his fetish.' Who is this fetish ? The Czar ? or the holy images ? Do you want to provoke the people to iconoclasm ? It is worse than blasphemy ! In former times you would have had your tongue torn out for such words. And again : ' By importunity

wrests gold and fetters.' A calumny upon our thirteen official grades! Fetters! Thorough Jacobin heresy! So the fetters offend you? Without them, you were wolves and no men! Nor do you need to importune for them; they are conceded without it, of grace! You must have fetters—*must*, I say! It is in vain to versify against them! Did not my red pencil strike out those three lines, I should deserve to have it bored through my nose!"

And, in view of this awful possibility, he began applying the said fateful pencil with dire force, with intent to expunge the offending lines.

"But I do not permit you to strike those lines out of my poem. I would rather withdraw it from publication."

"But I will not give it back!" returned the death's head, placing a hand upon the manuscript. "What is once presented to my censure, can no more be withdrawn! It must receive the deserved castigation!"

"And I protest against the striking out of any single letter of it! The manuscript is mine; it is as much my individual property, as is that red pencil yours. You are at liberty to reject my writings; but not to deface them with your confounded chalk!"

"Deface! Confounded chalk!" screamed the death's head, rigid with horror. "Audacity can go no farther!"

"By heavens, it can!" shouted Pushkin, on his side, and to substantiate the words, snatching the red pencil from the Censor's hand he threw it so violently to the ground that the precious relic was shattered to a thousand pieces; at which awful result Pushkin himself was so terrified that he took to flight, leaving the terrible man alone with the fragments.

The Censor was aghast with rage and horror at the deed. His all-powerful pencil shattered to atoms! He could scarce believe it. Such a thing had never before happened in civilized Europe. What

would men leave sacred and untouched in future, when even that hallowed implement could be dashed to the ground?

Herr Sujukin did not call his servant, but himself kneeling down began to collect the precious fragments, weeping so bitterly as he did so that his chin trembled.

"My faithful pencil—my treasure—pride of my life—thou art no more!" He endeavoured to fasten the larger portions together, but in vain.

Such an offence needed a special punishment.

The aggrieved Censor, wrapping the *corpus delicti* in a paper, rolled Pushkin's poem round it, and hastened off to Araktseieff's Palace, mentally conning the speech the while with which he should make his patron acquainted with the abominable assault.

Araktseieff's Palace was just then being decorated with those historic frescoes, by which the celebrated Doyen perpetuated the deeds of Czar Alexander. The master was even then himself at work on the immense circle which formed the cupola of the domed reception-room, in which the Czar appears in the midst of his generals and surrounded by mythological and allegorical figures.

The furious Censor had to pass through this saloon. He glanced up at the master, who, astride, on the plank, was touching up the figures, already designed, with colour. It was just what he wanted. He would let off some of his rage upon him.

"Is it Master Doyen, or one of his assistants, who is painting up there?" asked he.

To this singular question the artist made reply—

"And pray what may be your business down there?"

"I have no 'business,' but am Vasul Sujukin Sergievitch, Counsellor of Enlightenment to His Majesty." Such was the Censor's title.

"A good thing you have come. There is precious little light in this city with its confounded fogs."

"Learn, sir, that this is no 'confounded' fog. A St.

Petersburg fog is purer than that of any other city. We allow no complaints of our skies. But, look! who is that woman up there in the picture, standing close to the Czar, with leg bared to the knee?"

."It is Fame; the goddess of novelty."

"But what indecency for any one to stand in the proximity of the Czar, in such a costume!"

"Ha, my friend, in the period of Roman-Greek mythology stockings were not in fashion."

"But we are in Russia, where ladies who have been presented do not go about barefoot. I forbid you to bring women in such scant attire in contact with the person of the Czar!"

"All right! I will give her sandals."

"And let down her dress!"

"It is going to have a border to it."

"Mind, then, that it is a broad one that covers the knee. And who is that with a roll of papers in his hand?"

"General Kutusoff."

"Why is his right arm shorter than the left?"

"It is not shorter; only his position makes it appear so. We call that *scorzo* in Italian."

"*Scorzo* here, *scorzo* there! We are not Italians! Here we call a man who has one arm shorter than the other, deformed!"

"But I cannot paint my characters with stretched out arms as if they were on a crucifix!"

"I don't see why not."

The artist here, giving up the discussion, began touching up the face of the Czar.

"What is that black you are smearing over the countenance of the Czar?"

"*Terra di Siena*. It gives the shadows."

"But there must be no shadow on the countenance of the Czar! It must shine, be radiant, brilliant. And then, look here, one-half of the Imperial face is broader than the other."

"Of course it is; because it is taken in three-quarter profile."

"But why do you take the Czar in three-quarter profile?"

"Because he could not otherwise be looking straight at Kutusoff."

"Then turn Kutusoff's head so that the Czar may look at him in full face."

The artist was nigh to springing off his plank with brush and palette, and alighting on the head of the dictatorial Counsellor of Enlightenment. But, controlling himself, he took up a large brush and began painting in the clouds in the background. This thoroughly provoked the Censor's severity.

"Halt! What are you doing? What is that?"

"A cloud."

"I can, under no conditions, permit you to paint clouds behind the person of the Czar. It might seem to some to have an allegorical meaning, as though our political horizon were threatened with dark clouds."

"But, my dear sir, clouds are necessary to make the figure stand out."

"The Czar stands out by himself! You must paint in a twilight sky for your background."

"Impossible! Light is thrown on to the figures from the other side, where the sun is shining."

"Where is the sun? How are you going to paint it—in what colours? With us, the sun shines far more brilliantly than in any other country."

The artist looked round to see which paint-pot he could aim at the Enlightened Counsellor's head. Then a better idea struck him.

"Stop a bit, Herr Counsellor! Here, at the feet of the Czar, is to be a figure, 'Death Conquered.' Your head will make a capital model. Just let me jot down a sketch of it."

The Counsellor of Enlightenment once more felt his reason staggered. He could not at the moment decide whether it were a compliment, or an impertinence, that his physiognomy should be perpetuated on one canvas with that of the Czar, as 'Death

Conquered.' But his brutish instincts whispered him that it would be doing the Frenchman a service to stand as his model ; so he did not do it. Leaving him in the lurch, he passed on to his patron's apartments.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE YOUNG HOPEFUL.

THE Counsellor of Public Enlightenment was just by way of detailing at large to Araktseieff Pushkin's unheard-of outrage upon the censorial red pencil, with all its aggravations, when a young man unceremoniously bursting open the door of the reception-room of the dread President of Police, appeared upon the scene. The intruder seemed privileged to break in upon him unannounced, whoever might be having audience of the all-powerful statesman. The newcomer was a man of some thirty years of age; his dress, the uniform of a colonel in the Life Guards. His features were pleasing and regular, but the expression uneasy, shifty; he never looked the person to whom he was speaking full in the face.

It was Araktseieff's son, and young hopeful.

"Ah!" cried his father, "you have got into some other ugly scrape, sir!"

"On the contrary, father! Mistaken for once."

"Your appearance rarely means anything else. Have you anything of importance to say to me?"

"Oh, nothing of a nature that I cannot say before Herr Sujukin."

"I suppose some pressing money difficulty?"

"Not at all," returned the young man, carelessly throwing himself back upon a couch, and ostentatiously drawing out a handful of gold from his pocket. "You see it is not that which brought me."

"By Jove! You have lined your pockets well. May I inquire the source of this plenty?"

"Why not? No need to conceal it from Herr Sujukin. I won it a night or two ago at *rouge et noir*."

"So! At nights, when you are entrusted with the inspection, you can manage to find time for the *faro* bank?"

"I only just happened to drop in and hazarded a couple of sovereigns; seven times, one after another, I won. I had deuced good luck; red always turned up. And I left off playing while the vein was on."

"And you come to tell me the good news?"

"Oh no! On the contrary, I come to bring you the latest. Only fancy, the celebrated harpist, Chamberlin, has arrived from Paris, and is going to give some concerts."

"I never knew you to be so devoted to the harp."

"Oh, I rave about it."

"And I dislike it," put in Sujukin, in full agreement with the father.

John continued—

"His Majesty the Czar, to do honour to the harpist, has commanded a state concert to-night at the Winter Palace."

"Oh, I delight in the harp!" hastily threw in Sujukin, in order to amend his former speech.

"The invitations are already issued. It will be a particularly brilliant assemblage. I just saw your invitation delivered to your groom of the chambers. I have already received mine."

"Oh, then, of course, it will be a brilliant affair!"

"I suppose you know that we must appear in full orders? Men with the *grand cordon* and all their orders."

"Upon my soul! Doing high honour to the musician."

"Besides which the Zeneida will sing something of Cimarosa."

"Is that all you have to tell me?"

"Beyond that, nothing," returned the young man

rising with a yawn, as he looked at the clock. "Now I must be off and change. By the way, shall you be at the state concert to-night?"

"What else should I do, as the Czar honours me with an invitation?"

"I thought, perhaps, your rheumatism was plaguing you too much."

"Do not forget that there is no rheumatism when the Czar commands."

"And yet it were a pity to risk your health, sir, for sake of a scoundrelly musician. You will be awfully bored. There is nothing in the world so ghastly dull as the harp."

"You just told me you raved about it."

"Oh, of course, if it is a lady-harpist. But to see a man sprawling over the strings! *pas si bête!* It is, for all the world, like listening to some street player. I could make your excuses to the Czar for you in form, if you preferred to stay at home."

"Now, what the devil does it matter to you whether I go or not? What has made you such an affectionate son, so solicitous for your father's health? Have you entered upon the climacteric years which alter a man's nature?"

John broke into a laugh.

"Not exactly, father. Your son is the same as before. But I want you to stay at home to-night, because then you could lend me your diamond Vladimir order. I can't find mine anywhere."

"Because you have not searched at the pawnbroker's for it."

"With clear conscience, I can say it is not at the pawnbroker's. If it were I could have easily redeemed it with the cash in my pocket; and need not have come to you. I have searched everywhere, and cannot set eyes upon it."

"Just think, my boy; you'll remember what you've done with it."

"Well, then, I will confess. It is no disgrace; a

thing that happens to many of us officers. After winning, I came across a demoniacal little girl."

"Ah, you found time for that, too, during inspection?"

"What matter! When I released the said little fury, I perceived that my Vladimir order had disappeared with her."

"Upon my word! It is a pretty story!" cried Araktseieff, springing up from his chair. "You have done for yourself. Did I not say that some nice mess had brought you here? Lose your order! Let it be stolen from you by a street wench! Do you know the girl?"

"Yes; she is a street dancer—Diabolka, the gipsy girl."

"A gipsy, eh?" broke in Sujukin at that moment. "That's it! Just what might have been expected from Pushkin's verses. Ah! I can generally see through things!"

"Did you put the police at once upon her track?" asked Araktseieff.

"As though the police were to be found at once, or to put it the other way, as though our police were likely to find any one at once. Oh, it is not lost! The gipsy, or the Vladimir order will be found fast enough in Apraxin-Dwor. But that's no use to me. I want to wear the order to-night; for I dare not appear without it at the state concert."

"Well, my boy, no power but death shall separate me from mine."

"Then I see no way out of it. I have tried to obtain one from the State Treasurer; but the Czar keeps the key of the Order safe himself; so nothing is to be done there. It is enough to make a fellow blow his brains out!"

"Well, well, here is an idea; but, mind, I take no responsibility for it. Are you on good terms with the Czar's groom of the chambers?"

"Oh yes, excellent! We meet constantly—under the table!"

"You are aware that when the Czar attends any civil function and not a military parade, he is pleased to show his Imperial favour towards civilians by appearing in a plain black coat, and wears no orders, merely the gold medal in his button-hole which he received from the society of "Philanthropists," in Riga, for having saved a poor peasant from drowning in the river. Thus, amid all the brilliant assemblage, the Czar is conspicuous by the simplicity of his attire ; and his Vladimir order will be in the custody of the groom of the chambers for the night. Bribe your friend to lend you the Czar's order to-night."

"By Jove ! a brilliant idea. I see, after all, that you love me, father."

"Ah ! were you not my son, my boy, you'd long ago have been swinging on the gallows."

"No, no, sir. Why joke with the word 'gallows' ? You may come to them yourself one day, though you are my respected parent."

"But I give you one piece of advice. See that you keep as far off as possible from the Czar at the concert ; that he may not recognize his own order."

"Bah ! how is he to single out one amidst the forty that will be there ?"

"I tell you this much, that the Czar is an expert in precious stones. So make a point of keeping in some obscure corner."

"Well, I will be your obedient son. I am pleased with you to-day, father. It is no light matter to have such a sensible parent to come to. I grant you permission to give me a kiss. Adieu. Good day, Herr Sujukin. Pray continue where you left off."

Meanwhile the death's head had been chewing something between his teeth, perhaps a criticism, whilst the young man was making a clean breast of it. "A good many things to strike out with the red pencil there," thought he, to himself. The father gazed for some time at the half-open door ; then, turning to Sujukin—

"A fine, handsome boy, is he not ? A merry

fellow. His worst fault is that he knows how much I love him."

"He only needs a little of the red pencil. But to return to the story of that red pencil."

"You shall have satisfaction, Vasul Sergievitch! Leave the matter to me. I will place the *corpus delicti* into the Czar's own hands, and can assure you that the culprit will bitterly repent his offence! As though his first intemperate actions, which he paid for by the confiscation of his property and his banishment to Odessa, were not sufficient reminder, he requites the clemency of the Czar, who permitted him to return home, with these fresh excesses; and we will find a means of settling with him. Be comforted, Vasul Sergievitch. To-morrow morning Master Pushkin will find himself on his way to Uralsk."

"Irkutsk is further!" said the Censor, who could not refrain from improving on Araktsieff's verdict.

"But Uralsk is worse! Believe me, Uralsk is an awful garrison for an officer to be disgraced to. In ten years' time no woman would recognize him. From a gay butterfly he will come back transformed into a hairy caterpillar—like our friend Jakuskin!"

The death's head was satisfied to leave matters to him—and went back to the reception rooms to administer a parting shot to the Frenchman. After the encouraging words of the President of Police his horns had grown so fast, that he felt as if they would reach to the artist perched aloft.

"I forbid you to paint a figure of Death before His Majesty's very feet. It will give the whole fresco an ominous meaning."

But the artist continued undisturbed to paint in his figure of death; and the face was the counterpart of that of the Censor.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE CZAR SMILES.

ONLY as Pushkin reached home did he begin to meditate over what he had done. He did not for a moment hesitate as to the consequences of his rash act. A man only just permitted to return from exile in Bessarabia, whither his hot head had banished him, and even then but received in semi-favour at court, could not expect other from his recent scene with the sacred person of the Censor, than to be deported to some fortress on the Volga, or to guard the Kirghis Pustas, where he would be for ever lost to sight and mind. He therefore set to work at once addressing P.P.C. cards to his friends; on that to Zeneida he added, "for ever." When once he received marching orders, there would be no time for such things. The report of the assault had quickly made the round of the town; such news is sure to spread quickly. Among his many friends there was but one who found his way to him, on hearing of it; that one was Jakuskin.

"Well, friend, now you, too, will make acquaintance with the Caucasus. You would do well to have your portrait taken at once, that after ten years, when you come back, like me, you may, at least, know what you once were like."

"I am prepared for anything," answered Pushkin, sealing the letter in which he was returning the publisher, Severin, the two hundred roubles he had received for his poem, not having obtained the

Censor's permission to publish. "But there is one thing I cannot understand. I have just received from the Lord Chamberlain an invitation to the State concert to-night. Now, what the devil does that mean?"

"What does it mean, my friend? That your punishment is to be carried out with a refinement of cruelty! Had I not a similar experience? The very night I had challenged that scoundrel, I, too, received an invitation to a court ball." When the circle was formed round the Czar, the Lord Chamberlain placed me among the guests to whom His Majesty desired to speak. I was simple enough to feel elated at the distinction. My turn at length came. The great man stood, before me, letting me feel his colossal height. Looking full at me with his cold green eyes; his face as immovable as a moonlit landscape; he asked, 'You are not satisfied with your commanding officer?' And, taking my confusion for acquiescence, added, 'We will provide against any such unpleasant friction in the future.' And I stammered out something like thanks; never thinking that this was only a planned humiliation for me; that every one, standing round about me, knew already whither I was to be banished; and that the honour of this Imperial interview was merely intended to further humiliate me. Oh, if I had but known it then! If it should again happen that I— Ah, fool that I am! Fate does not so repeat itself. But could I pass on to you my embittered heart, my experience, and my determination at the moment in which you will be standing there, face to face with 'him,' apart from all, all eyes upon you, but every man's hand turned away from you; no one near you, but a devil! Casca's devil! But what am I talking about! You are but an Epimetheus to whom wisdom only comes when the opportunity is past. A pleasant journey to Tungusia; my respects to the marmots. Come, let us shake hands. We are comrades now."

"Eh! fate does not repeat itself? How if the soup be not eaten as hot as it is served?" asked Pushkin, simulating light-heartedness. But Jakuskin's words had left a sting in his heart. Why had he received the invitation to the palace that night?

There was no evading the command. His sledge was one among the many formed in line before the gates of the Winter palace that evening; the guests numbered more than two thousand, the whole of St. Petersburg society was there.

At that time the Winter Palace in its magnificence, tone of society, its mode of paying compliments, and distinguished courtesy threatened to rival the Tuileries; even Parisian *bon-mots* went the round. All national characteristics had become decidedly bad form. Ladies no longer wore the fur-lined *dolmanka*, the clasped girdles; the singular fashion which had formerly prevailed of wearing gold watches in the hair, had been given up; feminine taste displayed itself in following the latest Paris fashions, in which lace and artificial flowers were *de rigueur*. The men wore uniforms. The Czarina was the sole exception to the prevailing fashion; she continued to wear the out-spreading head-dress, in form of a peacock's tail, which made her tall figure seem even taller, and lent still more majesty to her countenance. The Czar, on the other hand, was wearing plain civilian evening dress, without ribbon or order of any description.

Late as was Pushkin's entry among the gaily attired throng, he could not fail to notice how greatly the tone of society had altered towards him from the night before. People did not seem to see him. His superior officers and others to whom he had been presented, did not acknowledge his salute. Intimate friends, comrades in arms, seemed suddenly engrossed in conversation with their neighbours on his approach, to avoid accosting him. Lovely women, who but yesterday had welcomed him to their opera boxes, spread out their fans before their faces as he neared them; the heat suddenly became oppressive! One

lady alone, clad in rich silks, crossing the room on Prince Ghedimin's arm, vouchsafed him her attention ; she was the beautiful Princess Korynthia, Prince Ghedimin's wife ; her cold grey eyes measured the young officer from head to foot—she who had so often laughed at his wit—while she deigned him no other return to his salutation than a contemptuous curl of the lip, for which he promptly revenged himself by turning and exchanging mischievous smiles with the young girl at her side, Princess Bethsaba. Just then the press before them brought Prince Ghedimin's party to a stand-still, and Pushkin saw the bright flush which had suffused the young princess's face under the fire of his eyes. Almost he felt inclined to say : " Nay, fair rosebud, do not blush at my gaze. To-morrow I shall be speeding to the land where your fathers sleep ! "

The Prince and Princess were now received by Araktseieff, who conducted the ladies to the armchairs reserved for them near the stage on which the artistes were to appear. Ghedimin disappeared among the crowd of brilliant uniforms ; there were no seats for the men.

The concert began with a Sonata of Beethoven, to which the Czar listened absorbed, as he leant over the back of the Czarina's chair, his tall figure over-topping all others, his eyes fixed on vacancy. When it came to the turn of the harpist his manner became animated. Hurrying across to the performer, he led him on the stage, settled the music stand for him to the requisite height, and then, as his chair was too low, himself fetched a cushion, oblivious for the moment that he was the Czar of All the Russias. The harpist acquitted himself magnificently, fully bearing out his world-wide fame. At the Czar's State concerts there is no applause ; but the murmurs of delight passing from mouth to mouth of a crowded audience are a higher reward to the artist than the stormiest applause.

After the harpist followed Fräulein Ilmarinen.

Every one said she had never sung the Swan's song so thrillingly and exquisitely as on that evening ; the tears sparkling in her eyes were as real as the brilliants which flashed in her hair.

The Czar involuntarily was beating time to her song. Zeneida looked lovelier than ever that night ; her dress was covered with spring flowers ; her face was radiant. It could not all be art.

Three pair of eyes were fixed most untiringly upon her. The first were those of Princess Korynthia. Filled with hate and contempt, they strive to read into the singer's inmost soul ; to detect some false look of betrayal which shall expose the artiste in the part she is playing ; and the Princess inwardly rages that she does not find the clue.

The second pair of eyes are Bethsaba's. Her great dark eyes are staring wide open at the charming apparition, as though to say, " Does the devil look like that ? Then, indeed, one must be on one's guard, for its counterpart is very lovely ! "

The third pair of eyes belong to Pushkin. He feels that the better part of his soul is merged in that of the lovely woman before him ; and that soul, at this moment, is filled with bitterness against all those who would banish him from her vicinity. He feels that in losing Zeneida he loses all that is noblest within him, and that evil alone will remain. Already it has gained the upper hand as he recalls Jakuskin's speech : " Oh, that I could infuse into you Casca's fiendish spirit, when you stand, the mark of every eye, before ' him ' ! "

He feels himself touched on the shoulder. Looking back, he sees the Lord Chamberlain. Speaking no word, the latter was lost in the crowd of men.

Pushkin knows what that touch on the shoulder means. It means that at the close of the concert the person thus signalled out is to take his place in the middle of the concert-room, as one of those to whom the Czar designs to speak. Exactly as Jakuskin had prophesied ! The blood rushes wildly through

his veins. The comedy may be turned into a tragedy.

Princess Korynthia turns to Araktseieff, standing behind her chair.

"Fräulein Ilmarinen seems to be in particularly good spirits this evening."

"I have done my best to spoil them. I have struck her heart a blow which will stop her love of intrigue for a while."

"Let me be the first to enjoy your secret."

"The lady's hero, Pushkin, is about to be despatched to Uralsk."

"Do you think the girl will desert St. Petersburg and follow him?"

"Either that, or she will commit some greater folly. Anyway, it will compel her to unmask."

The Czar, after thanking and praising Zeneida, now began to make the round of the gentlemen; while the ladies to whom the Czarina desired to speak were called up to her.

The Czar entered into conversation with some of the ambassadors, exchanged a few words with Miloradovics, then passing over a number of the circle, looked about him, and perceiving Pushkin, signed him to approach.

All deferentially drew back. From the Czar and a culprit it is well to keep one's distance. All the same, every eye was fixed on the two.

At this critical moment Pushkin felt himself singularly calm. He stood in fact as cold bloodedly before his Imperial master as he would have done before any ordinary man.

"So I hear you are not satisfied with your Censor?" asked the Czar.

The very form of question he had addressed to Jakuskin!

But Pushkin had a guardian angel—his Muse—who did not suffer him to remain silent and abashed.

"As satisfied as one is with an illness, Sire."

"Do not bear him a grudge. He is a well-meaning

man, but with certain old-fashioned notions. That is not his fault. I have read your poem ; it is very fine. The Censor had struck out some portions ; but that you did not allow ? ”

“ No, Sire.”

“ And do not now allow their suppression ? ”

“ No, Sire.”

“ You are right. They are the best passages in the whole poem. But what are we to do about it ? I cannot go against the Censor ; for were I to permit what he forbids, the whole institution would be overthrown ; and it is a necessary one. What do you think ? ”

“ Sire, I will take back my poem, and burn it.”

“ No, no. I think we will send it to Leipzig, have it printed there, and then import it.”

“ And the frontier custom-house, Sire ? ” asked Pushkin.

The Czar smiled ; nay, he laughed—he laughed aloud.

“ We will have it packed in among my own personal things, which are not examined in the customs. Thus will we bring the poem into the country.”

Pushkin trembled in every limb, like a schoolboy who has undergone an examination.

“ Stay a moment ! ” exclaimed the Czar. “ It will be more profitable to your poetical studies were you to prosecute them in the country. It will be better for you to pass the summer on your estate of Pleskow. You will find you can write better there.”

That meant the restoration of his confiscated estate. Moved to tears, Pushkin’s voice failed.

“ Tell no one of what has passed between us. I do not wish it spread abroad.”

“ Only to one woman, Sire, whose silence is as perfect as is her singing.”

“ She knows it already,” returned the Czar, with a smile. He had smiled twice.

How instantly the brightness of that smile had changed the temperature. How immediately the ice

and snow in it had thawed. As Pushkin rejoined the circle, he was greeted on all sides by friendly faces beaming with congratulation. Distinguished court ladies shut up their fans; they no longer felt the heat. Pushkin could not respond with sufficient cordiality to the crowd who claimed acquaintance. He was wise enough to tell every one that the Czar had restored his Pleskow estates to him on condition that he gave up writing poetry, which raised him at once on a pinnacle. For be it known, not to write poetry at all is a negative merit; to write bad poetry and give it up, is some slight merit; to write good poetry, and yet give it up, is a positive and great merit—in high society.

Even Princess Korynthia had the hero of the hour called up in order to ask him why he had not recognized her just now? Women alone are capable of such a piece of audacity, and men are obliged to take it from them.

Pushkin and the Princess conversed pleasantly for some little time, and he was introduced to Betsaba, to whom he said many foolish things.

One woman only, Zeneida, he had no courage to approach. With the divination of a true poet, he felt that she was the only creditor in all the world from whom he must keep aloof. For that which he owed to that creditor he was unable to pay.

Nor had he any news to impart. Had not the Czar said, "She knows it already"?

The Czar had smiled. The smile had lightened all hearts. The melancholy feeling of monotony which was weighing over society was at once dispelled. But it was but an autumnal ray—a ray of evening sunshine on a rainy day.

But he to whom this turn of things brought no content was Araktseieff. Pleskow is not the end of the world! If Pushkin went no further than that, Fräulein Ilmarinen's intrigues would suffer no reverse.

They could meet as often as they wished. He could not understand how it had all come about. That the Czar favoured Fräulein Ilmarinen he well knew ; and that Zeneida had been working to save her beloved poet, that, too, he knew. But this was not sufficient to have put the Czar in the very opposite frame of mind from that which he, the all-powerful favourite, had striven to bring about. Some other hand must have been at work here.

Now among those whom the unaccustomed ray of sunlight had moved to creep out of their dark corners was young Araktseieff.

Forgetting his father's advice to keep well in the shade, and not thinking that the sparkling order on his breast was a borrowed one, and that its owner was among the company there assembled, he suffered himself to be enticed to the front, and joined the set of young men who were paying court to the ladies.

Suddenly he became aware that the Czar was bearing down upon him.

He was about to make way respectfully for his Majesty, but the Czar, advancing towards him, said—

“What fine diamonds those are you are wearing, Araktseieff !”

He, who was thus addressed, replied with audacious humility—

“Sire, I wear them by your Majesty's favour.”

“Remarkable !” exclaimed the Czar. “Those brilliants are the very counterpart of the ones in my Vladimir star.”

John Araktseieff began to think that effrontery alone would carry him through this crisis.

“Sire, some diamonds resemble each other wonderfully.”

“And yet I am inclined to think that the star you are wearing is mine, and that in my pocket I happen to have a Vladimir order bearing your name on the ribbon.”

“Mercy, Sire !” implored John, with shaking knees.

“Silence ! You surely would not implore mercy

here before the whole court. Go to your quarters. Keep the order you are wearing; I will wear it no more, since it has been worn by you. Away with you!"

"A bad adviser led me on, Sire." The young nobleman was ready to betray his father.

"I do not ask who advised you. Go to-morrow morning to your father. There you will learn what is in store for you."

After this scene the Czar abruptly left the concert-room, and withdrew to his own apartments, the former icy expression on his face. He did not even return the greetings of the surrounding guests.

Araktseieff, who had watched the scene from a distance, followed the Czar. He was not admitted, but commanded to await his Imperial Majesty's pleasure, and the all-powerful favourite was in trembling expectancy until two in the morning.

Then the Czar entered the audience chamber, carrying a roll of papers in his hand.

"What say you, Alexis Maximovitch," said he to his favourite. "Was it not a good idea of mine to institute the *posta sofianskaja*?"

"Without doubt, Sire. It has given the people opportunity to bring their needs and wishes directly, in written form, before the Czar."

"One learns interesting things through it, at times. This morning, for example, I received a letter from a gipsy girl containing a Vladimir order set with diamonds. The letter graphically recounted the manner in which the said order had fallen into the girl's hands. Here, read it."

Araktseieff was never so near to swooning as when he had come to the end of the letter. It was a cruel bitter blow to his heart; he was cut to the quick in his paternal love. He had wanted to strike a blow at that woman's heart, and it had rebounded on his own in its most vulnerable place. That this was all Zeneida's doing, there was no manner of doubt. Araktseieff was to be disgraced before the Czar.

She meant to bring upon him what he had intended for her.

But she should find herself mistaken.

Refolding the letter, he said coldly and calmly—

“The criminal must suffer.”

“Will it be punishment enough if he be sent to Uralsk?”

To Uralsk! That meant never to see him more! He, the well-loved only son, the arch-rogue for whom he lived, for whom he gathered up treasure, through whom he trusted to make his name live to posterity; he to be buried in a rocky fortress of the Kirghis steppes! But, if it had been good enough for Pushkin, who had resisted the extinction of his poetic fervour, why not good enough for a soldier, who by nights made burglarious onslaughts on the passers by? And yet he would so gladly save him! After all, it was no crime, only a foolhardy scrape, such as had taken place in old chivalry, and even been practised by King Henry of England himself when he was yet Prince of Wales. Foolhardiness, but no crime! He suppressed the defence, however, feeling that although the Czar might perhaps pardon his son at his intercession, such pardon would mean the end of the father's influence. His enemies should find themselves mistaken if they reckoned upon that.

“He was my only son,” he said sobbing. “I loved him above all the world, but I love the Czar better than my only son. He must suffer, if he has sinned.” And he prepared the ukase, condemning his son to banishment in Uralsk. Then kissed the Czar's hand.

Araktseieff parted from his son without saying farewell to him. He must carry out the part of Brutus consistently, that his enemies might recognize the ancient Roman in him and tremble. But the Roman in him had a strong admixture of the Sarmatic. Like Foscari, he could sign, with his own hand, his only son's banishment; but not because he made no distinction, but out of the genuine love of a Russian

subject towards his ruler, and by making his powerful position still more powerful, to be able to pay back to his enemies the cruel vengeance they had wrought on him.

To this end he made preparation. No single one should be exempt.

On the very day his son set out on the road from which so few ever return, Magriczki came to him with the intelligence that the police had arrested Diabolka. What should be her penalty? Should he have her knouted in the open market-place, or with slit ears and nose be transported to Lake Baikal? There was cause sufficient. Her vagabond life, her immoral habits, could be brought up against her—moreover, a gipsy girl! Was not the dark skin crime enough?

"Bring her to me," said Araktseieff. "You, none of you yet know how to punish. This is a wild animal who only feels the smart of the lash while it is upon her. It were no shame to such as her to be beaten half naked in the market-place; she is brazen enough to laugh while the punishment is being inflicted. Of what use is punishment to her yet? First, that sense must be awakened in her, latent in every human being, but slumbering yet, the sense of self-respect. Then we can inflict the penalty when something more than her outer skin will feel it. Send the girl in."

And soon Diabolka was standing before Araktseieff, both hands chained to her back, her unkempt hair about her saucy face, her eyes gleaming wildly through it. Her feet, too, were chained.

"So you are Diabolka, the street dancer?" asked the President of Police.

"Of course. Don't you hear my castanets?" answered the girl, striking her feet together, and making the chains clash.

"And do you know who I am?"

"Of course. The father of a street thief."

"You are right! My son is an offender; he has

paid the penalty. I myself signed his sentence. Was it you who informed against him?"

"I might deny it if I chose, but I do not."

"Was it you who wrote the letter to the Czar?"

"Though I cannot write, yet it was I who wrote it."

"Then somebody guided your hand, and you wrote down the characters?"

"But you shall never know the name of that 'somebody'."

"Were you aware what your hand was putting to paper?"

"I was."

"Then you must have been aware that not alone he whom you denounced was lost, but also you yourself, for having stolen a Vladimir order."

"But I have returned it."

"None the less, you are a thief, and must be sent to the pillory."

"Women of higher rank than mine have stood there already."

"Your shoulders will be branded with hot iron."

"My dark skin marks me already as a gipsy. I am bad from head to foot."

"Come, I don't believe that. This very day, through you, I have for ever lost my only son. All night long until the sun rose I was tossing in an agony of sobs on my bed. In the early morning I went into the chapel, and there, before my Maker, I swore an oath that I would free the unhappy creature who had been my son's undoing, body and soul. At least, I will loose your outer chains."

"No need to trouble the gaoler for that. If I choose and you allow, I can be rid of them myself."

The gipsy girl had extraordinarily little hands. Easily, as if she were drawing off a glove, she drew out her hands from the fetters; and as simply, without even sitting down, freed her feet. Lifting one foot in the air, she balanced herself on the other, and, in a second, stood unfettered. So she stood before Araktseieff, holding one end of her chain in her hand,

looking capable of laying about her with the other end on the head of any one who came near her ; and that person would have remembered the attention to his dying day.

The keeper was alone in the cage with the un-chained leopard.

“Listen to what I will do with you !”

The leopard took an attitude as if about to spring.

And this time Araktseieff was not, as usual, prodding about with his sword stick. He had no weapon of any description near to hand.

“I will find you a respectable situation, where you can both live quietly and honestly, and educate yourself, mind and body ; where, in fact, you can improve yourself.”

“But I don’t want it. I want neither a cloister, nor praying nuns, nor hypocritical monks. I will not work, unless I am beaten and made to ; and even if I am beaten, I won’t pray.”

“You shall not be forced to anything of that kind. I will send you neither to a cloister, nor to a reformatory, but into the country. I have a castle on my estate where a dear friend of mine is living.”

There was a sudden sparkle in the girl’s eyes. Throwing away the threatening chain, and shaking back the loose hair with sudden movement from her brow, she looked with joyful smile at the President of Police.

“You would send me to Daimona ?”

“Yes ; to Daimona.”

Ah ! stern Cato Censorius then had yet one tender chord in his heart, one far more tender even than that which had been wrung by the banishment of his son !

There was much talk about Daimona, but not in her favour ; and what was said of her was but a shadow of truth—the woman whom the favourite of the Czar worshipped more than all the saints in heaven or earth ! It was with her he spent every moment he could snatch from affairs of State. She was the

sun of his life ; at once his tyrant and his happiness. She was a woman so savage, so cruel and passionate, that none but an Araktseieff could have loved her. Or was it just for that reason that he did love her? Every one who wished to appeal to Araktseieff, or hoped to escape his vengeance, must first sue to his idol and offer his sacrifice at her feet ; and costly sacrifices they must be—no make-beliefs. Daimona's extortions were renowned throughout the breadth of the empire.

Diabolka's pearly teeth glistened white through her coral lips.

"So you would like to go to Daimona?" asked the great official.

"Why not? She is a woman after my own heart."

"I am not sending you to her to be her servant, but to be her friend."

"Oh, we shall soon be very friendly!"

"She feels lonely ; and you will know how to amuse her."

"I will divine her thoughts."

"If she takes a fancy to you, you will be happy with her. She will give you smart clothes, trinkets, and riding horses."

"And a whip to scourge the slaves with."

"And if you get on well, and become a *young lady*, Daimona will find you a husband."

At these words the girl's face darkened. Shaking her head energetically, till the dishevelled hair fell over it again, she struck her thigh vehemently as she exclaimed, with a stamp of her foot—

"Then, I will not go!"

A malicious smile curled Araktseieff's lips. Then he continued in a paternal tone—

"I understand. You have a lover here, among the gipsies."

"A 'brother!'" exclaimed the girl.

"Oh, a 'brother!' Gipsies are prudish ; they only have 'brothers.' And suppose I were to send your brother, too, to Daimona's castle? He might make a good overseer of slaves."

"Would that be possible?" cried Diabolka, joyously.

"It shall be done. I will send you together to Daimona, and you shall become her confidential people."

Diabolka fell at the feet of the dreaded President, and kissed them, while Araktseieff, with Christian mildness, stroked the gipsy's unkempt hair. And at the moment of this scene of foot-kissing and hair-stroking, the hearts of both were filled with thoughts of direst vengeance. In the inexperienced girl's soul a scheme of as wide-spreading a nature was developing against Araktseieff, as he was evolving for the torture of the girl; while she was as deft at lying, dissembling, and hiding her feelings as was the statesman. It is the advantage alike of savages and diplomats.

Which would triumph?

Diabolka and her "brother" set off that very day for Araktseieff's estates, where Daimona was already expecting them.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A RED SKY.

ARAKTSEIEFF'S chief care now was to divert the Czar from the influence of his, Araktseieff's, enemies. And the best means to that end was a visit to the military colonies. This atrocious idea had originated in Araktseieff's brain ; he was the creator of the military colonies. Half a million soldiers, who had gone through every European war, were to be rewarded for their services by being planted as colonists, regiment by regiment, throughout the length and breadth of the empire. The peasants were to teach them to plough and sow seed, while they in turn were to instruct the peasants in drill and the use of firearms. A marvellous conception—on paper ! Thus in time the State would acquire three millions of well-drilled soldiers at no cost. The scythe would pay the piper.

But one important factor in the project had been left out of his calculations by its author. The peasant did not take kindly to drill, nor did the soldier to the scythe.

The Czar took the military colony of Novgorod for his first inspection ; Araktseieff was in his retinue. They returned unexpectedly ; a fact mentioned in the newspapers, as showing with what marvellous rapidity the Czar travelled. He had actually accomplished the journey to the Ural Mountains in four weeks ; it was a peculiarity of his to gallop night and day. Then they went on to describe the magnificent reception the Imperial *cortège* had met with in every

town of the colony, which had sprung up with magic quickness. They dilated on the triumphal arches, deputations, the gifts offered them by the people, by which they endeavoured to express their unbounded loyalty to the Czar. The great military parades which had been held were also graphically described ; and no one for a moment suspected but that all these things had duly taken place.

On his return from the inspection, Araktseieff went on an official mission to Warsaw. This, too, was duly announced by the newspapers, without comment of any kind or description.

With the month of June, springtide returned to St. Petersburg. Sophie Narishkin's room was a mass of lilies of the valley, her favourite flowers. Every vase, every available space was filled with them. With the more favourable season her health seemed to be re-established. She could now walk across the room without support, and began to think more about food than medicines. She even began to speculate on being taken to court balls in the winter. One of her aunts was to chaperon her in society ; perhaps she might even be allowed to dance a minuet. She was constantly sending for Bethsaba to hear what a court ball was like. The king's daughter had already attended one.

One day, after the Czar's return from the inspection, Bethsaba came to see Sophie.

"Oh, your room is quite full of lilies of the valley ! Who sent them to you ?"

"Who else than father ?"

Sophie had no secrets from Bethsaba. She openly called the Czar "father" to her.

"Has he been here ?"

"Yes ; all last evening. It was a very sad one. I begin to feel quite afraid of him."

"Did you do anything to vex him ?"

"Oh no ! It is his great love for me which makes me begin to feel frightened of him. When he stands so long, looking silently at me, my hands in his, I

feel as if I cannot endure the silence ; then I ask him, 'What is it, father ? What is grieving you ?' And he answers, 'My grief is that I have no one to whom I can tell my troubles.' 'Can so great a man as you have any trouble for which there is no help ?' Then, pointing to his heart, he said, 'Here is the trouble !' Upon which I coaxed him, and begged him to tell me all his trouble. Who could tell—perhaps even my childish simplicity might find a way to heal or lessen his sorrows ? Then he drew me again to his heart, laid my head on his shoulder, and said, 'I am ill, Sophie ; and there is no physician in the wide world to whom I can tell my ailment. There is something weighing on my heart, and there is no confessor to whom I can confess it. By night my dreams make me tremble ; by day, my thoughts. I dread solitude, and I dread mankind. I know that no one loves me ; I know that I am condemned.' 'By whom ?' 'By God and man. Every one flatters me ; only that which beats within me tells me the truth, and accuses me.' 'And does not this, too, that beats within me tell the truth ?' I cried ; 'and does it not live, love, and worship you ? Let those two hearts of ours fight it out together !' Then he embraced me, and whispered, 'Be it so. There is no one on whom I have wrought such ill as you. Why should I not confess to you ? You are my martyr ; if you can give me absolution, I am indeed absolved.' And kneeling before me, he said, oh ! such sorrowful words, 'Look ! I ascended the throne over my father's body. *I accepted the crown at the hands of his murderers*, and placed it upon my head. I wept no tears when I heard of his death ; I felt relieved. I had no longer to dread his wrath, for he had parted from me in anger. On how many a battlefield have I since sought expiation ! It was not for me. It was written upon my brow that the bullets that whizzed about me should not strike me ; it was spoken of me that my punishment should be as my sin. As a son, my heart was cold as stone to my father. How was

I to suffer in my children! I have borne them all to the grave. You are my last and only one! I am ground down to the earth under the iron hand of Fate when I think of you, when I look into your dear face. Are you, too, to be condemned for my great 'sin?' I tried to console him. 'I want for nothing, father dear,' I said; 'I am happy, quite happy, and mean to grow strong, and love you ever so long.' And we both burst into tears. 'It is not for myself I tremble,' he whispered. 'I see the sword hanging over me. I hear, in the watches of the night, how the knife is being sharpened against the corner-stone of my palace. I am ready. *Through blood I ascended the throne; in blood I must descend it.* But it is for you that I tremble! God's sentence upon me must not strike your head too!' Then I made him rise, and said such wise things to him that I quite astonished myself; I am usually such a silly child. I comforted him in a hundred ways, so that at last I won a smile to his lips, and he said, 'Then give me absolution. Say, *Christe eleison!*' I was so brave, that I even began to talk politics with him; actually got to matters of State! I said, 'Why torment yourself with such fancies? Your people are not as bad as those of other countries. I know something of the world! I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Germans.' When they drink hard on holidays, they grow noisy and quarrelsome; but your subjects, when they drink at holiday time, only stagger about, and laugh and embrace each other."

"Did not that make him laugh?"

"He only kissed me, telling me I was a wiser counsellor than either Talleyrand or Metternich; then grew grave again. 'So it used to be in former times; and the distinction your wise little head draws did then exist. But nowadays there is something in the air which seems to infect the most peace-loving people; so that what you are sure of one day you cannot be the next. I will tell you what happened to me on my recent journey. It is not talked

about, and newspapers and parliamentary reports will be dumb about it. It was growing dusk as I neared the military colony of Petrowsk ; the setting sun was tinting with a bright crimson stain the fleecy clouds covering the sky. It looked like a ragged imperial mantle.' Here I, scolding him, asked who had ever seen a ragged imperial mantle ? And he, answering me, said, ' Among others, Julius Cæsar. I remarked that it was a sky which presaged storm. "A mere fancy," returned Araktseieff.

"In the light of the crimson sky, the triumphal arch erected in the street of Petrowsk looked like a bower of molten gold. The other triumphal arches under which we had passed had been of fir, which, taking no reflection from the sun, looked gloomy, however brightly it might be shining. What was this made of that it shone so brightly ? An immense throng surrounded it. As I drew nearer I discovered of what it was composed. Oh, I have passed through many a triumphal arch erected in welcome of me. They have been made of velvets and satins in my honour ; I have seen the two side pillars formed of cannon conquered from the enemy ; the arch decorated with standards wrested from them ; the crown in the centre formed of the orders of fallen heroes ; the glittering aureole around of the swords of the generals who were our prisoners. But the triumphal arch of Petrowsk exceeded them all.

"That which from afar in the light of the setting sun shone golden were strips of ragged shirts and gowns ; in place of flags were beggars' sacks ; the crown was composed of crutches stuck through an old bottomless cooking-pot. It was a triumphal arch built up of rags and beggars' sacks ! While I stood transfixed at the hideous phantom, there stepped one from the midst of the crowd—a fine, tall old man, with flowing beard, holding in his hand the customary wooden vessel, in which was a crust of bread—and said—

““This is the bread which your soldiers have left

us. Taste it! It is made from the bark of fir-trees. The usual salt we cannot offer, for we have none but our salt tears. On this triumphal arch, you will find many a token left us by your soldiers; the ragged clothing of our wives and daughters. They themselves are not here, because they could not appear naked before you. The twelve chaste virgins commanded by the Hetman we could not present to bid you welcome, because in all the neighbourhood there does not exist a single chaste virgin since you have quartered your soldiers upon us."

"At these words Araktseieff gave the command to the Companies of Guard Cossacks in our suite to disperse the rebellious crowd. But they were no rebels, but despairing men. As the trumpet sounded they threw themselves down by the wayside before our horses' feet, and, with hands and face uplifted to me, implored—

"Deliver us from your soldiers! Take your armed men away from us! We are loyal peasants, and will work. You must ride over our bodies if you wish to go further."

"It was impossible to make way along the ground so densely strewn with prostrate figures. Nor angry threats, nor gracious words availed. Without intermission they cried, "Take your soldiers away from us!" Seldom has a ruler been in such a dilemma. At length came help. From the military colony appeared rank upon rank of veterans, marching in close order, at their head a drum-major, as venerable and grey-bearded as was the peasants' spokesman. I recognized them as my grenadiers. They understood how to overcome the obstacles in their way. A blast of the trumpet, and the sappers advancing seized the peasants by their hands and feet, and, heaping one upon another, made summary way for the brigade to pass. The drum-major, planting his standard on the ground, said—

"Sire, do not leave us in this cursed place. We served you faithfully in the battlefield for fifteen

years ; we fought for you against Frenchmen, Germans, and Italians ; and are we now to wage war against field mice, grasshoppers, caterpillars, and, what is worse, peasants ? In our youth we learned to fight like bears ; we don't want, in our old age, to learn to plough like oxen. We understand how to use our guns and sabres, but we are not handy with scythe and sickle, and must we be mocked at by peasants ? Lead us into the enemy's country, where behind every shrub lurks an ambush ; but, for pity's sake, Sire, do not leave us here among your peasantry. Send us into the field against idolaters, but do not leave us here to be cursed when we ask anything ; cursed when we strike them ; cursed if we only look at them. Shut us up in a beleaguered fortress, where we have only the flesh of fallen horses to eat—must season it with powder instead of salt ; and for drink have only the water that runs down the walls ; but do not condemn us to this forsaken spot on earth, to labour for our bit of bread, envied by a set of thieving, treacherous peasants. Bury us under the corpses of our brothers on the field of battle, but do not bury us alive in the military colony ! Curses on him who first thought of it ! ”

“ Araktseieff here commanded the trumpeter to put an end to the man's speech, but now peasants and soldiers began to make such an uproar that the trumpet notes were deadened. Tlia' (the Czar's coachman), 'without awaiting orders, turned the horses' heads, and we drove back the way by which we had come, but avoiding the triumphal arch. Thus ended my progress. When I reached home I read in the papers the glowing accounts of the ovations I had received. The red sky had truly betokened storm. This is what my poor father told me.”

“ It is indeed sad for so mighty a Czar, when his people *will* not be happy, whom he *would* fain make so. My father's people were happier. Why does not your father go to them ? They are his subjects.”

"Bethsaba! What a capital idea! 'Don't let me forget it. I will propose it to him as soon as ever he is in better spirits. Just now, he is so depressed. After he had said good-bye, he came back to me again. 'I forgot to ask how you were?' 'That proves,' said I, 'that I must be looking well.' Looking anxiously at me, he asked if my face was always as red as then; and I, laughing, said 'Yes. But why are you so anxious? Does not the good God know how you love me; and are you not the anointed, the chosen one of Him to whom you pray for my recovery to health?' 'Yes, He knows,' he answered gloomily, 'that I love you. But was not King David also His anointed, chosen servant? And did not the king sing all night through his despairing, penitential Psalm, and yet his child was taken from him, in punishment of his sin with Bathsheba?'"

"Who was that Bathsheba?" broke in the king's daughter. "It can only be another form for Bethsaba. Was there really any one who bore that name before me? I have hitherto searched in vain to find a namesake in society, or in the Calendar. Never have I been able to find one. My godmother, Duchess Korynthia, who named me so at my christening—up to my sixth year, I was a heathen—in answer to my question why I could not find it in any Calendar, told me it was another name for Elisabeth, and that St. Elisabeth's day was my name-day; and they give me presents on that day. And now the Czar has told you that there really was a Bathsheba. Who was she?"

"I do not know any more than you. I have never been taught anything about her, although I am curious to know." I asked old Helena, and got from her that Bathsheba was St. David's wife; but that was all she knew, for only the priests are allowed to read the Bible. On that account it is written in Bulgarian."

"But why, then, should she not be among the saints in the Calendar?"

"Of course, because she was a Jewess!"

"But she said she had sinned. Oh, why did my godmother give me the name of a sinful woman?"  
And Bethsaba was ready to cry.

"Bethsaba dear," said Sophie, "please don't tell anybody what I have told you about the Czar's tour and the triumphal arch."

"But if my godmother asks what we have been talking about?"

"Tell her something else."

"What else?"

"Make up a fib."

"A fib! How does one do that? I have never done it."

Sophie Narishkin laughed in great amusement. She had learned to lie and fib as quite a little child. Instead of "mamma" she had had to say "madam," and if her father brought her *boubons* to tell people that "Nicolo" (*la mère Cicogne*) had brought them.

What old Helena told her she dared not repeat to "madam;" what she heard when with "madam" she must not breathe a word of to old Helena; what either said must not be repeated to the Czar, and what the Czar told her must be kept from everyone. So she had been so inured to lying that she had once brought her doctor to the verge of despair, when, on his trying to find out her symptoms, her prevarications made a diagnosis next to impossible. How the poor child had rejoiced when at last she found two beings to whom she might really open her heart, her father and her friend!

"So you always tell everyone all you know?" she asked Bethsaba.

"Oh no; although I do not understand the art of fibbing, if anyone thinks to pump me, or catch me unawares, I have my own way of being even with him. I begin to ask so many questions that he or she is only glad enough to leave me in peace."

At which they both laughed. The music of fresh young laughter was rarely heard in that cage.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### BETHSABA.

PRINCESS GHEDIMIN had accorded her royal god-daughter permission to visit her friend, Sophie Narishkin, frequently. To one but partially acquainted with the Princess's secret heart, such intimacy was easily explained. As appearances forbade her personally from visiting the child, at least through Bethsaba she could obtain news of her health.

But to one in possession of the whole truth, there was yet another cogent reason.

The Czar, that reserved, laconic man, who had secrets from his ministers, and did not even confess to the priests, was in the habit of telling this favourite daughter everything. When an ordinary father confides things to an idolized daughter, they are matters of feeling; if that father be the Czar, what he confides are matters of State.

Every word the Czar utters to Sophie Naris'kin must necessarily concern the condition of the country. Alexander I.'s words form the basis of Europe's present and future relations. The softening or hardening of his heart betokens peace or war. In that heart of his rest the mysteries of great developments or upsettings of nations.

And Sophie has no secrets from her bosom friend, Bethsaba.

"Well, dear child, how did you find your little friend to-day?" asked the Princess, on Bethsaba's return.

"She is taking her medicine more regularly ; and, I think, it is doing her good ; for I tasted one of her powders one day, and it was very nasty and bitter."

"Was she not talking a great deal again ? Talking is bad for convalescents."

"She told me that she had had a visit from her godfather."

Bethsaba had so far learned to "fib" that she said "godfather" instead of "father."

"Did he stay long with her ?"

"I do not know."

"Did he tell her anything of interest ?"

"Oh yes ; about King David and his wife Bathsheba. Do tell me, what was Bathsheba's fault ?"

"Bathsheba's fault ! What makes you ask me such a question ?"

"Because *he* spoke about it ; and I want to know what it was. Why is no one called after her ? And if she was so wicked, I don't want to bear her name either. Give me some other."

"Quiet, silly child ! She did nothing wrong."

"But Sophie's godfather told her that she had committed sin with King David."

"It was love, and no sin."

"Love ! What is that ?"

Maria Alexievna Korynthia laughed aloud.

"Now, am I to tell you what is love ? You will know soon enough, child, when you fall in love yourself."

"How shall I do that ? Is love an evil which attacks people like an illness ; or is it a good thing for which people long ?"

Maria Alexievna Korynthia laughed still louder.

"Both together !"

"How does it begin ?"

"When a young man looks deep into your eyes."

"Into my eyes ? I could not endure that ; I should die outright."

"But suppose the young man wanted to make you his wife, and became engaged to you ?"

"How can all that come about? I cannot imagine it."

"The young man might begin by sending the girl some special birthday present."

"And that would mean, that he was in love with her? And if the girl accepted his present, would it mean that she was in love with him? Oh, how nice, how delightful! Must the girl make him a present too?"

"Only her love."

"Nothing else? Oh, how pretty, how charming! And suppose some other young man gives us handsomer presents, do we accept them too, and love him as well?"

Korynthia clapped her hands with amusement.

"Yes, of course. But only if one can keep the second lover secret from the first."

"No, no. No secret dealings. I would rather confess that I loved another too. And why not? If love is good, and no crime. For instance, when I have a husband, may I not tell him that I love strawberries?"

"Strawberries! Oh yes. That is only eating."

"May I tell him that I love Sophie Narishkin?"

"Oh yes. That is only friendship."

"And would he behead me if he knew my love for dancing?"

"Of course not."

"Then if I may love strawberries, dancing, and my friend, why not a youth, if he be good and handsome?"

"Oh, precious innocence! Do people never talk about love in your country?"

"Never."

"Are there, then, no youths and maidens?"

"Of course there are. But in our country when a young man wants to marry a girl, he settles her price with her father and takes her home. If she is loving and faithful to him, he buys her costly clothing; if not, he turns her away, and buys himself another wife."

"That is not the custom here. Here a woman may

only love one husband ; this is commanded by our religion ! ”

“ That is quite different. Why did you not tell me at once that love is commanded by religion ? Oh, I will faithfully follow the dictates of religion ! You do, too, don’t you ? You love your husband ? Do you look deep into his eyes ? I have never noticed it.”

“ Ah, child, life is long ; and the season of love, we call the honeymoon, all too short.”

“ Then the honeymoon, or month, should be portioned out into minutes, and minutes into seconds, that each day of one’s life should have one such second.”

“ You will soon find the impossibility of that.”

“ Now I know that Bathsheba’s sin was in not loving the man whom her religion commanded her to love. Yet what had King David to do with all that ? ”

Yes ; Korynthia, too, would fain have known how King David got mixed up in the Czar’s talk. For the chattering girl had so confused her with her endless, inconsequent questions, that she never thought of the prophet’s words of reproof to the king.

A Russian is reticent beyond all men. None save the Czar dared to allude to the affair of the triumphal arch. Araktseieff was silent, because he did not want the fiasco connected with his military colony scheme to spread. The detachment of Cossack guards were despatched to Kasan, and those others who had been present knew how to observe profoundest silence as to what had taken place.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### KORYNTHIA.

THE young Circassian Princess could not have been in a better school than that of Princess Ghedimin.

Korynthia might have served as a type to that Russian naturalist who, outdoing Darwin, endeavoured to prove that women are degenerate cats. In vain, be it here mentioned, was it sought to soften him, so far as to modify his views into their being a race of ennobled cats. He stuck to his opinion. The beautiful Korynthia could be coquettish as an Aspasia, stonily cold as a Diana. This time, however, it was not Diana, but Aspasia, who changed her lover into Actæon.

\*       \*       \*       \*

The men whom she distinguished with her favours, like Chevalier Galban, never succeeded in unravelling the riddle of the lovely sphynx. Korynthia allowed him to accompany her in hunts, danced with him at balls, gave him her bouquet to hold when dancing with another man, laughed at his sallies, made fun of others with him, even kissed him at parting, the while holding him as far off as a planet its satellites—and of such satellites she had more than Saturn—each and all permitted to revolve about her, none to approach her too near.

Yet when in society she fixed a man with the stony look of a goddess, acknowledging his bow with the contraction of the lips by which great ladies express

at once, disdain and reproach, he was the man for whom her heart was cherishing secret flames.

No one knew it, for he, thus signalled out, an officer of the guards, distinguished alike for his genius and his many gay adventures, was careful to keep to himself that one day a perfumed note was brought him by a mysterious messenger, and on opening the delicately tinted envelope, he read: "An unknown benefactress, who is interested in your fate, is ready to pay off all your debts if you will stay away at nights from Fräulein Ilmarinen's Saturnalias."

We think we are not mistaken when we take, in connection with the above, the usurer's speech, who certainly did not volunteer ~~it without~~ good grounds. "There are certain young, rich, and lovely ladies in St. Petersburg who are ready to come to the aid of a young officer whom I could name."

The young Endymion's reply to the perfumed note was that night to enter the prescribed Eleusis on the box-seat of Zeneida's sledge.

Korynthia's hatred of Zeneida was not on account of her husband, but of Pushkin. Zeneida's position with regard to Prince Ghediniin was only superficial. The devotion of great nobles to *prime donne* is merely a matter of fashion, and of cutting two ways, "What is allowed to you is allowed to me!" The things which rankle most in the Princess's mind are that her rival possesses a finer exotic garden than she does; that she has finer horses; and that, whenever they meet, her toilets are unquestionably triumphant. And they are constantly meeting; for her fame as an artiste opens all doors to Zeneida. They meet at balls; their horses are pitted together on the turf; their carriages are in juxtaposition at reviews; and the Princess is convinced that all this luxury is derived from her husband's Siberian silver mines, which enable their owner to indulge in the amusement of permitting two women to out-rival each other in the art of squandering. Could she but come out conqueror in the strife she might

forgive the artiste her extravagance ; but never would she forget, that she, a princess, had had to yield, even though the concession was but trifling. Here was the second ground of her hatred of Zeneida.

There was still a third. The moment of weakness, which in early youth had made her an important factor in the life of the Czar, was forgotten ; had been long buried in oblivion. The Czarina was the object of universal admiration, sympathy and worship ; and she was seen to be visibly fading before people's eyes. Public opinion, indeed, became so strong in the matter, that it was often a question in secret societies whether there should not be a repetition of what occurred in the reign of Peter the Great and Catherine II., namely, to make the Czar prisoner and proclaim Elisabeth reigning Czarina. And withal, Princess Ghedimin knew herself to stand nearer to the Czar's heart than did the Czarina ; a silken cord—Sophie Narishkin—held them together. No such silken cord of union existed for Elisabeth. Alexander's love for her as a husband had been buried for ever in the grave of the last child she had borne to him. And here, once more, did Korynthia find her detested rival in her path.

While the Czar avoided her, he lavished the wealth of his favour upon Zeneida. The *prima donna* stood between Czar and Czarina. Both loved and petted her. They were never together save when Zeneida made a third. When listening to her singing, reading aloud, or the charm of her pleasant talk, the imperial couple would forget their mutual estrangement, and draw together ; when, on the contrary, the Czarina, appearing at some court festivity leaning on the Czar's arm, would come face to face with the Princess, their arms would fall abruptly apart, and they would turn away from one another. That she knew right well. And, withal, Korynthia must display her favours to those who were indifferent to her, appear haughty and disdainful to those she would fain have encouraged, seem affectionate to the husband she

hated, be humble to the man on whom she had a claim, and play the magnanimous protectress to the rival of whom she was jealous. Jealousy is terrible enough when it has one head ; how much more when it has three ! The three heads of her jealousy were : passion, pride, and remembrance.

And to her had been entrusted the bringing up of the Circassian king's daughter ! The Princess began her task by giving her at her christening a name which the world then, and now, can only have condoned for sake of the psalmist king, David.

It was a fortunate thing for Bethsaba that, in addition to her inexperience and innocence, she was blessed with a considerable fund of imaginative fancy, and of the characteristic cunning of her people. Moreover, she remembered many a saying of her good mother, whom now she sees but once a year, on New Year's Day, when some forty thousand people assemble to pay allegiance to the imperial pair in the great Throne Room. There stands her mother on the steps of the throne ; but her brow bearing furrows in the place of a crown. And as Bethsaba gazes she remembers that her mother, to whom she may not speak, exchanged crown for furrows, because she stabbed the man who dared say to her, "I love you ; give me your love in return."

Then she would begin to ponder over what that "love" could be which had made it so easy for one to slay and the other to die. Sometimes it would seem good and sweet, and one's duty ; at another, evil, full of pain, and, above all, sinful.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE MONSTER.

KRIZSANOWSKI had just ended his report of the St. Petersburg conference—to which a pale lady had lent most careful attention—when the duenna, keeping guard, entered hurriedly, and whispered, “Araktsieff has come.” Then as quickly retreated.

“Oh, heavens!” sighed the pale lady, pressing her hands convulsively to her bosom.

“Now, be strong as a man,” whispered Krizsanowski. “The decisive moment is at hand!”

“Can it be that that brings him?” she asked tremblingly.

“Not a doubt of it. Look well to your women, for he brings an arch spy with him. Handsome and dangerous with the sex.”

Just then the sound of carriage wheels was audible in the courtyard below, amid much noise and the harsh tones of a man’s voice.

“Make haste! Away! The Grand Duke is coming!” the pale lady whispered to Krizsanowski.

Rising, he took her hand in his.

Again the duenna appeared; this time rushing in, and saying breathlessly—

“The Grand Duke is back from the manœuvres. Just as they drove in at the gate one of the horses stumbled, the outrider was thrown, and the Grand Duke’s pipe was so jolted that it broke one of his front teeth. He is wild with rage.”

"Alas!" exclaimed the lady; and was hastening out. Krizsanowski held her back.

"You would do well just now to keep out of his way."

"On the contrary, it is just now that I must hurry to him," she answered, freeing herself from Krizsanowski's hold. "But you, hasten away from here, that no one sees you."

"Well, then, be strong as a woman," he murmured, and disappeared.

Yet it was so difficult to disappear. Krizsanowski was in the palace of Belvedere, in the royal park of Lazienka, the residence of the Polish Viceroy, outside Warsaw. The park was surrounded by a great wall, guarded on all sides by armed soldiers. The castle itself a fortress, with high bastions and intrenchments, a deep moat round it, and drawbridge; every outlet was protected by an embrasure, there was no evading the sentries. Within cannon-range the noble forest trees had been cleared away, and turf laid down adorned with tulip-beds. It was humanly speaking impossible to go or come unperceived. And yet Krizsanowski did succeed in getting away, although Grand Duke Constantine had had the Belvedere built to his own plan, and had watched its construction with his own eyes. It was impossible that there should be any secret passage unknown to him—and yet, supposing one did exist? The architect had been a Pole. He was capable of constructing a secret passage by night, and so building it up again that the Grand Duke had no notion of its existence. And so it really was. Constantine might have been surprised in his bed any night, were not assassination detestable to a Pole.

His wife hurried out to meet him.

The tyrant met her in the armoury hall. He was exactly as his contemporaries have described. Imagination had not run riot.

The Grand Duke had reason enough to be wroth with his brothers. They had all inherited their mother's beauty and noble presence. He, alone

possessed his father's repulsive features and person. Czar Paul was the impersonation of ugliness, so hideous in appearance that he would allow no coin bearing his effigy to be struck during the course of his reign. And Constantine was a faithful counterpart of his father. His enormous horn-shaped nose stood out from his face as if it had no connection with his forehead ; his little sea-green eyes were scarce visible under his thick shaggy eyebrows and blinking, almost shut, eyelids. His hair, beard, eyebrows, and eyelashes were the colour of hemp ; his face red as Russia leather. But the most remarkable thing about him was that the one-half of his face was unlike the other ~~as though~~ nature had intended to crown her master work of ugliness by joining together two different caricatures. One corner of the mouth was turned up, the other down ; the scars of small-pox, wrinkles, warts, so completed the disfigurement that the painter who would have perpetuated the face could only have attempted it in profile. In fact, the artist who would have painted him full face would have been guilty of high treason. So he is described by contemporary writers.

His exterior was the true picture of his inner man ; his features were the reflex of his passions. To look at him was to make one shudder or deride. As was his face, so was his disposition—violent, passionate, cruel to a degree. He carried a stick always in his hand, and laid it about him freely. If it be true that his brother, the Czar, spent two thousand roubles a year in quill pens, it may be guessed what amount Constantine's yearly budget showed for smashed walking-sticks. The stick he now held in his hand was broken, and split all the way up. No doubt he had been again laying it impartially about the shoulders of the several commandants of division. Their morning prayers were blows.

And there must needs come this accident. And through the confounded horse stumbling, and the postillions being thrown, the pipe, which was never

out of the Grand Duke's mouth, had hurt his gum and broken him a tooth. He uttered the most horrible oaths, spitting out blood the while.

"Cursed hound! As soon as he comes to himself throw him into the water to rouse him! Bring him here. Miserable rascal! I'll break all his bones for him!" Just then he became aware of a gentleman advancing towards him. "Who is that? Chevalier Galban? No, you fools—that hound, I mean; not this gentleman! What does he want? Araktsceiff has come? The devil take— Hump! It's the barber I want, and not a minister. Can't he see I've got a broken toot'? Why are you hanging about, Chevalier Galban?"

At that moment a lady coming hurriedly up, pushed the Chevalier aside.

"For Heaven's sake, what has happened to you?" she cried, throwing herself on Constantine's breast. "My life, my dearest, are you wounded? What is it?" And she kissed his bleeding lips.

Over the monster's face dawned a sudden smile—a smile, joyous as the aurora borealis; sad as the depths it was, but it transformed the Grand Duke's hideous face. It chased away his violence. The wild rugged features became more harmonious; the brutal mouth endeavoured to assume a gentle expression.

"Nothing, nothing, my love!" he replied, in the voice of a lion caressing its mate. "Now, now, do not cry. Don't be frightened!"—his voice growing lower and lower. "There is nothing the matter."

"Oh, but your lips are bleeding. Your tooth is broken."

And she tried to staunch the blood with her handkerchief.

"It is not broken clean out," growled Constantine. "Only the crown of it. And the devil take the crown!"

"Why, your Highness," put in Galban, beginning to take part in the conversation, which had assumed

so much milder a tone, "what do you say, 'May the devil take the crown?'"

"At present it is only the crown of my tooth that is under discussion," returned the Viceroy, emphatically, in somewhat trembling tones. "Go you to Araktseiff, Chevalier Galban, and rest awhile after the fatigues of the journey. We shall have time for our talk after dinner. Before I have eaten and drunk I am in no mood to discuss State affairs. Do not spoil my appetite. And as for you, bring that good-for-nothing here as soon as he has come to himself. I will try a couple of good boxes on the ear to see if his teeth are set like mine. The scoundrel! If I had not been holding my pipe pretty firmly between my teeth, the mouthpiece would have pierced through my jugular——"

"Oh, don't!" stammered his wife, in superstitious dread, laying her trembling hands over the Grand Duke's mouth.

He, pressing a kiss upon the palm of her outstretched hand, threw his arm round her waist, and she, nestling up to him, they retired to their inner apartments, leaving Chevalier Galban standing in the hall.

"So you really would grieve if I were brought to you one day dead, run through the chest to my back?"

"Oh, do not say such things!" exclaimed she, making the sign of the cross over the spot to which Constantine pointed. And to smother such fearful words, she shut his mouth with a long, fervent kiss.

"Child!" murmured the monster, and taking his wife's head between his two hands, like a bear hugging the head of a lamb, he looked into her eyes. "Child! Does it not go against you to kiss my mouth? Do not the fumes of tobacco disgust you?"

With an innocent glance, she answered—

"I suppose every man's mouth emits the same smell of tobacco. I remember my father's did."

At these words the monster pressed her with such

force to himself, as though to stifle her in his embrace.

"Oh, wondrous child! She knows neither the lies nor the flatteries of a Court lady. She does not tell me that my breath is ambrosial. She only knows that it was so when her father kissed her, and therefore the lips of every man must be the same! Wife of mine, my father was as hideous as I am, and his wife loved him as dearly as you do me. And yet he was as repulsive as I."

"You cannot tell what you are like."

"Oh yes, I know. My mother used to tell me. She loved me best of all her children; spoiled me; allowed me my own way in everything. When my brothers and sisters used to complain about it, she would say, 'Let him alone. It is because he has his father's ugliness that I love him so.' But I am a bad man too, and that my father never was. True he was hot-headed, and a blow was as quick as a word with him; but I am savage by instinct. I am bad because I like it."

"That is not true. Who says so?"

"I say it myself. Often when I come home with an inch of cane in my hand, having broken it on the backs of all who have come in my way, I feel as if I could break the rest of it on my own head." Here, for the first time noticing that the broken cane still hung from his wrist by the strap, he flung it hastily from him.

"No, no, dear," said his wife, "it is that bad men exasperate you to wrath. You have to do with rough people who are stupid and cunning; and that irritates you. If they were good you would treat them kindly."

The monster stroked his wife's cheeks with caressing hand.

"And you really believe that I am good? Wonderful! I should have thought I had done enough to give proof to the contrary. I thought I was a very devil."

Meanwhile his wife had coaxed the monster to her dressing-room, and sitting him down before the toilet table, had been busily occupied by the aid of all manner of brushes and combs in bringing hair and beard into something like order. Then she bathed his hot, dusty face with lily water, and stuck court-plaster over the cut on his mouth.

"Am I a pretty boy now?" said he, with the look of a child who has just had his face washed.

"That you always are to me. But to-day you will have strangers dining with you."

"True. And, moreover, grand gentlemen from St. Petersburg; from our Russian Paris. Of course they are accustomed to smart folk, so make me smart! How do we know whether these Frenchified gentlemen will like your Polish cookery? You make light of it, after the manner of women-folk, and then they'll praise it!"

"Do you wish me to appear at the table?"

"Of course. Why not? Even were the Czar himself my guest! Are you not my own little wife? Come, answer; are you not my very own little wife?"

She answered a timid "Yes."

"I would not advise any one who values sound limbs in his body to presume to look down upon you, Excellency or no Excellency," cried the Viceroy, wrathfully, menacing his own face with his fists in the glass. "True, this Araktseieff was devoted hand and foot to my father—he followed him about like a dog. Yet, for all that, I'd rather know him to be safe on the island, which Kotzebue named after him, in the Yellow Sea, than here."

"Why, dearest?" asked his wife, as she tied and arranged the Grand Duke's necktie.

"Oh, women have nothing to do with State secrets," he answered, as he strove to twirl the ends of his moustache evenly; an attempt in which all his efforts were unavailing, for one side would not keep together. Woe to the private if the Grand Duke's

eyes lighted on an ill-waxed moustache! "I only tell you he may esteem himself a lucky man if I have no cane at hand during our interview."

"Oh, don't terrify me, dearest!"

"I was only joking. May I not have my bit of fun? Well, are we ready now? I am hungry. I have been working all the morning like any corporal."

"We will go, then. Won't you choose out one of your sticks?"

In every room of the palace where the Grand Duke went, even in his wife's dressing-room, stood a couple of sticks, and it was as much as any one's life was worth to move them from where he placed them.

"A stick? For what? I am not lame."

"No; but to chastise the culprit who ran you into such danger. You might have been killed. He well deserves to be punished."

"Does he really? Well, then, you choose one. What this good, stout one? Ah, that won't break so easily. So you feel more for me than for the man who injured me? Come, that is a rare trait in your sex. Women usually expend their sympathy on the guilty. Now, then, let us be off."

Johanna took Constantine's left arm; the stick was in his right hand. In the armoury hall, the delinquent, with head bound up and swollen cheeks, was awaiting sentence. He trembled like a dog when he saw the Grand Duke in the doorway.

"You scoundrel!" snorted the monster, swishing his cane threateningly through the air. "You deserve a good sound hiding! Can you not look out when you are driving? So you have got badly hurt? There, take these five roubles—buy yourself doctor's stuff with them. Gallows bird! What, you limp! Then take the stick to walk with. you good-for-nothing!"

And he passed on with his wife.

A monster arm-in-arm with his good genius!

"Humph!" growled the Grand Duke. "It is

odd. You have discovered the better self within me and now it almost seems as if I, too, were sensible of it."

The two gentlemen were already in the dining-hall. There were no other guests. The Viceroy was not particularly hospitable; nor had he had much occasion to exercise that virtue, for the people over whom he ruled came but seldom to the palace. But they must stand high in favour who were allowed to sit at his table when his wife, Johanna, was present.

Araktseieff was one of these privileged ones. The two men had seen each other shed tears—once only, and no other eye had witnessed it. The occasion was when first they met after Czar Paul's death. The faithful follower loved the dead man as fondly as did the monster. Others breathed a sigh of relief when the grave closed over him. The world was rid of a burden! The assassins were pardoned; some even attained to high positions as generals. Two men only never forgave them—Grand Duke Constantine and Araktseieff. When, at Austerlitz, the French surrounded General Benningsen, Constantine charged them like a Berserker, at the head of a company of Dragoon Guards, and, with the daring of a wild animal, rescued him from their midst, only to call out later to him, "I have saved your life, and you were one of my father's assassins!" It was this common hatred which enabled him to "suffer" Araktseieff. He "suffered" him. And that meant a great deal with him. Moreover, Araktseieff was a minister who could be beaten—be sent away—and yet who always came back again.

"Zdravtazjtye!" was the Grand Duke's salutation to his guests. "One can still talk Russian with you, eh? You have not yet grown into full-fledged Frenchmen! Kiss my wife's hand!"

Chevalier Galban carried out this injunction with all a courtier's grace. Araktseieff, with the unction characteristic of the genuine Russian peasant, pressing

the lady's hand with both of his to his lips, amid many long-winded compliments, finally ended up with an amorous sigh.

"Ah, the sight of this domestic happiness, this 'sweet home,' reminds me of my own home."

Johanna alone was unconscious of the deep affront hidden in these words. But her very unconsciousness incensed the Grand Duke the more; his face crimsoned with wrath. It was well that he had but now made a present of his cane, else it would emphatically have pressed itself on Araktseieff's back, 'My good man, this is not Daimona!'

"Don't talk bosh!" growled the imperial host; "but toss off a glass of schnaps in good Russian style. I can't stand your foreign rads and fashions—French compliments and German maunderings. I never could learn a foreign language. I dare say you well remember, Araktseieff, the sort of schoolboy I made! My poor tutor! When he used to try to impress on me to work hard, I would answer him, 'What for? You are always learning and learning, and are only an usher, after all!'"

"Better still was the answer your Imperial Highness gave to your professor of geography: 'I do not learn geography; I make it!'"

"All very fine. But you see, I do not make it."

"All in good time."

"Enough. Here comes the soup; set to work, and don't talk. And keep silence, gentlemen, while my wife says grace; she does the praying for me. And now, no serious subjects during dinner. Anecdotes are allowed, drinking is a duty, swearing is not forbidden; but he who makes a coarse speech in presence of my wife, must straightway make full apology to her. If you get short commons, I must beg you, in my wife's name, to excuse it; she was not prepared for guests. That our fare is strictly national—Russian and Polish—needs no excuse. I cannot bear French cookery; the names are enough for my ears, let alone the kickshaws themselves for

my digestion! And as for my wife, they are positively injurious to her!"

Chevalier Galban had his word to say.

"Oh, French cooks are swells among us just now. The family 'Robert' are quite aristocrats in St. Petersburg; it confers nobility to possess one of them in one's household. His French cook is a greater personage than the Czar himself; for he makes out the Czar's daily *menu*, and suffers no supervision in his domain. He is a more important man than the family physician, for he rules strong and weak alike. What he refuses to serve up is unobtainable. M. Robert does what the Polish Senate alone was empowered to do when the 'nie-pozwolim' was yet in fashion. If his master sends word that he desires this or that dish to be served at table, M. Robert confronts the order with a decisive veto. Quite recently Prince Narishkin sent for his cook, that he might repeat to him by word of mouth his written refusal to prepare a blanc-mange for the dinner-table."

"What, did he give an audience to the fellow?"

"Yes; and M. Robert repeated his refusal verbally. The Prince began giving him a piece of his mind, when the *chef*, rising on his heels, said, 'Sir, you forget to whom you are speaking!'"

"The devil! And what was the end of the story?"

"Well, the Prince went without his blanc-mange."

"Ah, ah! That would just suit me. I should be for eating up the cook instead of his dishes."

Chevalier Galban was a capital talker; he took the chief burden of the conversation upon himself.

"A funny thing happened at St. Petersburg a few days ago, at Prince Popradoff's, who has a French cook, and a French tutor for the children. The cook was but so-so; the tutor no great pedagogue. All of a sudden the cook was taken ill, and confusion reigned. The tutor offered his services, saying he knew a little about cookery, and he was forthwith

despatched to the kitchen, where he sent up seven excellent dinners. Meanwhile the sick cook offered to carry on the little prince's tuition, and he made surprising progress. To make a long story short, both confessed to have only taken their situations from necessity, and, in fact, to have changed departments."

"And the Prince had not found it out? You must tell that story to my wife, more in detail, when you go into the drawing-room. Let us now speak of more important things. How was my august brother, the Emperor Alexander, Araktseieff, when you left him?"

As he named the Czar, the Grand Duke had risen, in which he was followed by the others.

"I regret, your highness, to be unable to give a satisfactory answer to that question."

"What is the matter, then, with his Majesty, my brother? Eh? Or can you not speak out before my wife? All right. You do well not to startle her. You shall tell me when we are alone. And how is her Majesty, the Czarina Elisabeth? Are there any unpleasantnesses between them? If you have no good news to give, better say nothing before my wife. Do not trouble her."

Araktseieff, in the face of this caution, found it wiser to say nothing.

"It's always the case when a man marries too young!" resumed the Grand Duke, picking his teeth with his two-pronged fork. "I found that out myself, and had cause to repent it. Well, thank Heaven, that's past! I had work enough before I could obtain a separation from my first wife. But we won't talk of that before my wife. After all, it was I who was in fault; I who was to blame. A woman who could put up with me, is as rare as a comet. And how does the world wag with you Galban; have you got caught yet? Who is the unlucky woman who calls you husband? If I were the Czar, I would levy a tax upon all such bachelors as you. The

old-bachelor tax! Lucky for you that I shall never come to the throne."

"Your Highness! It was an understood thing that we touched upon no serious subjects at table," observed Araktseieff, deferentially.

"Yes; you are right. I was infringing the rule. To make amends, let us empty our glasses to my wife's health."

The men's three glasses clinked together, then touched the fourth, extended to them by a white hand, while the fiery Tokay moistened a delicate red lip. Dinner was over, dessert on the table. The Grand Duke only took hazel nuts, which he cracked with his teeth. The first three he laid on Johanna's plate.

For the first time since she sat down to dinner, she spoke, and then but in a whisper.

"Oh, please be careful about your teeth. You might break away another crown!"

"That may be!" said the Grand Duke, leaning his elbows on the table, and darting a quick glarfce from under his bushy eyebrows at Araktseieff, who understood it. Then Constantine kissed his wife's forehead.

"Now leave us, darling. Have coffee served on the terrace, and take the Chevalier with you. He likes to end up dinner with his coffee in French fashion. While we, like good Poles, will sit over our wine a little longer."

On this Johanna, rising, took the Chevalier's arm, and, followed by a footman carrying the silver coffee equipage, left the dining-hall.

The two men, left alone, applied themselves to the wine, filling up their glasses a fourth time with golden Tokay.

"To the health of my august brother, the Czar!"

They drained their glasses, and refilled them.

"In truth, the Czar stands in sore need of that fervent aspiration!" quoth Araktseieff, with a deep sigh.

"What! is he seriously ill, then? What ails him?"

"He is suffering from the malady hardest to cure,—melancholia. All the doctors' arts are of no avail. For months together the Czar gets no sleep, save a short, unrefreshing siesta at noon. By night and day he is tortured by all kinds of fancies. He is weary of life; and what wonder? Wherever he looks, he sees nothing but ruin and decay in all that which he so painfully built up. The dreams he cherished are dispelled. Every institution for promoting liberty of thought and action which he called into life, has he been himself compelled, one by one, to annul and abolish. And he has no spirit or energy left to pull himself together, and devise new schemes. He feels that he has aroused disaffection, and has not the moral strength to become a tyrant and quell that disaffection. He knows himself to be surrounded by assassins, and has not energy to take firm hold of the only weapon which remains to him. Moreover, his domestic happiness is ruined. Your Imperial Highness knows the catastrophe. The Czar's spirit is clouded by the weight of religious depression; he looks upon himself as an irremediable sinner, condemned alike by God and man. Shudderingly surveying the fatality, he is hurrying it on. A mental condition such as this must in the end undermine the strongest constitution. The slightest indisposition might prove fatal at any moment; and he takes not the least care of himself. He will suffer no physician about him, and keeps his ailments secret. It is my firm belief that in his heart is the seat of disease, and that the heart is wounded to death."

"My poor brother!" muttered the Grand Duke, resting his head on his hand. "That noble, powerful fellow, by whose side I was at the victory of Leipsig, when he concluded peace with Napoleon on the island in the Niemen; and in the triumphal entry into Paris; and in Vienna, at the Congress; and

wherever we went, I heard people whisper, 'There he is, that splendid-looking man beside the deformed one!' Light and shadow; we were their true exponents."

"We must be prepared for the worst. The feeble flame which still feeds that light, needs but a breath to extinguish it, and then the whole country will be given up to most terrible anarchy. The ground is undermined by countless conspiracies; we are menaced on all sides. Who can withstand the flood when the gates of heaven are opened? The Czar has no children—who is to succeed him?"

"He whom the Czar appoints."

"And supposing he appoints no one? It is, indeed, impossible to get him to do so. The law, he says, speaks plainly enough—it is the Czarevitch who succeeds the Czar."

The Grand Duke burst into a loud laugh. He threw himself back in his chair in his fit of laughter; he laughed till his open jaws disclosed two rows of teeth, like those of a yawning lion.

"Ha, ha, ha! That's a good one—the Czarevitch! No, my friend, he is much obliged; he would rather not sit on the throne! You don't catch me wearing Ivan's diamond crown!"

"Why not, your Highness?"

"Because I prefer to see your ribbon across your back than about my throat!"

Czar Paul had been strangled by his adjutant's ribbon.

"What are you thinking of, your Highness?"

"Of my father—and of my people. I should be a pretty fellow for the St. Petersburgers! Last year, when my illustrious brother, the Czar, thinking himself in a bad way, was graciously pleased to command my presence, and I repaired to the capital, there was a panic! They began to take steps to appoint me his successor. As soon as I showed my face in the streets, they were cleared in a trice. People took refuge in doorways rather than salute

me. Ah! how they flocked into the churches! The sacristan had never had so many kopecs in his alms-bag as while I was in St. Petersburg. The priests almost dragged the angels by the feet out of heaven in their fervent supplications for the Czar's recovery. They sketched a caricature of my profile, with my huge nose, at every street corner, with all manner of slanders beneath it! And when it pleased Providence to restore my imperial brother so far that he could drive out again, there were rejoicings. The people thronged round his carriage, hardly allowing the horses room to plant their feet, and almost buried him under flowers. And all this to show their hatred to me. Not that they loved him, but because they dreaded me. You just now said that even he is surrounded on all sides by assassins; but the difference is that they would despatch him to heaven, me to hell. They believe they would find in me the son of my father—a man with iron hand for their iron necks, as was my sainted father."

"And that is what they need! The Russian's iron neck only bends to the hand of iron."

"Well, let them have it; but Heaven preserve me from them, and them from me!"

"But every true man sets his hopes upon your Highness!"

"Eh! Time enough for that. But why are we talking such folly? Why should I survive him? I am but eighteen months his junior. Fill your glass. Long life to my brother, his Majesty the Czar! And what else brings you hither? We will speak no more of that."

"I came with a commission from his Imperial Majesty. It is his pleasure that the succession be now settled. The Czar has no heir."

"Well—no more have I! But one may be on the way—as you see, I have recently married."

"So I see; but only left-handed. A morganatic marriage."

"So far. But as soon as my wife bears me a child, I will make her my legitimate wife."

"That is not possible to your Highness."

"Why not?"

"Because your Highness's first wife, Anna Feodorovna, is still living."

"But the Synod has granted me a separation; and she has already renounced the name of Anna Feodorovna, and resumed that of Juliana of Saxe-Coburg; moreover, my fresh marriage was entered upon with the sanction of the Czar."

"But it was only a left-handed marriage."

"Then we will convert it into a right-handed one."

"That is impossible. In the State Archives is an ukase of Czar Alexander, <sup>1855</sup>, the effect that only *women descending from reigning families may be raised to the imperial throne*, and the descendants of those who are not of royal birth may not inherit the throne."

"Then when I—which Heaven forbid!—come to the throne, I will promulgate another ukase annulling that one."

"But there is a further obstacle, which not even the Czar's ukase can overcome. Your Highness is aware that *a woman may not ascend the imperial throne unless she be of the Orthodox faith*. Does your Highness believe that Johanna Grudzinska would abjure the Roman Catholic faith for a crown?"

"Not for all the crowns in Europe! The heart of that woman is so staunch that she would scarce change a horse, grown old in her service, for a young one, still less would she change her religion! I would not advise any one to try to induce her."

"And there is another still greater obstacle than even that of religion—society. Is St. Petersburg society to be exiled from the Czar's palace? Johanna Grudzinska may be a very angel of light, but she would by no means make a Czarina whom the Ghedimins, Narishkins, Trubetzkois, Muravieffs, and whatever their names may be, would be willing to

acknowledge to stand on a par with themselves, still less to whom they may pay allegiance."

"Then let them keep it."

"What does your Highness mean by that?"

"A very simple meaning. Let them keep their crown. I keep my wife!"

"Your Highness does not mean that in earnest?"

"In thorough earnest, and in cold blood," said the Grand Duke, laying his hand on Araktseieff's arm. "All my life through I had never known what it was to be loved. I verily believe that the nurse who nursed me, thrashed me for being such a piece of deformity. Not even a dog have I ever been able to attach to me. Look where I will, I see that every one shrinks back from me. My very voice, which I try in vain to moderate, is rough and grating, as if I were perpetually scolding. I have never heard an endearing epithet since I was out of the nursery. And suddenly Fate, like a blind hen, casts in my way a pearl of women, a tender soul who loves me with all her being. She does not say it, she feels it—nay, she lets me feel it. She lives in me like the very soul and thought of me. The little good there is in me she awakens, and makes me reconciled to myself. She alone, of all the world, has brought sunshine into my dark life. When I am ill, she nurses me; when I am violent, she pacifies me. She is my better self! And do you believe that I would renounce her for any prize the earth could give? That for any throne in the whole world I would exchange this easy-chair where she has sat nestling up to me? Ah, what fools you must be to think it!"

"Your Highness! I have long made the human mind an object of study, and it is not new to find that love is the most powerful factor we have to deal with on earth. It is strong; but not lasting. To-day your Highness may be feeling as you say; but the human heart is as variable as the sky; and earth, the fatherland, is its antipodes. To-day we may feel as though we had cast away a whole paradise of

bliss in descending from heaven to earth ; to-morrow we discover that our supposed heaven was but a cloud which glistened in the sun—and disappeared leaving 'not a wrack behind.' Earth, on the contrary, remains firm beneath our feet—it never loses its power of gravity. What ? Could your Imperial Highness stand by with folded arms and see the whole monarchy, a prey to the flames, sink into ashes at your feet, that your head might rest undisturbed on the lap of the woman you love ? "

" Well, and even then ? "

" Even then ? Even in that case, I have my clear instructions. Your Highness is the master of your own future. *But the Russian Empire is the master of its own fate.* If the Czarevitch prizes the prosaic domestic life of a citizen higher than the maintenance of the empire he has received from his ancestors, I have yet one other proposition to make to him. His Majesty the Czar will elevate the morganatic wife of the Czarevitch, Johanna Grudzinska, to the rank of a Polish princess, with the family name of ' Lovicz ! ' In perpetual lien he will make over to her the royal Lovicz domain of Masover, upon the Grand Duke declaring her to be his legitimate wife ; her children to be Princes of Lovicz, and heirs to their mother's kingdom, with the rank of Russian bojars—*in virtue of which Grand Duke Constantine will resign the title of Czarevitch and the right of succession to the Russian empire, for himself and his heirs for ever in favour of his brother.*"

Constantine struck the table emphatically with his fist.

" Rather to-day than to-morrow ! "

" I entreat your Highness not to reply too hastily ! The sky is ever changing ; not so the earth. I am convinced of the truth of your Imperial Highness' words ; but a short delay cannot be of any vital importance. Let your Highness try absence from the lady, say, for a week or a month. Or send her for a time, as in truth her delicate health requires, to

Ems or Carlsbad. Separate yourself from her, so that you are not seeing each other daily, hourly; that she may not always be your centre, but that you may both come in contact with other people, other surroundings, other interests—”

“And do you suppose that absence, whether longer or shorter, could estrange us from one another?”

“It is an old story; yet ever new.”

“That one short month could suffice to cause some new face to blot out the other from our hearts? You are a fool, man!”

“It is but giving it a trial.”

“I may do it! But I tell you beforehand that you will find yourself mistaken—do not dream, for an instant, that your plan will be successful. We do not stumble, like ordinary mortals. For a woman to love me is akin to madness—it is incredible! But, once to love me, is never to part from me! And to expect me to forget that woman is an absurdity. Then, of a truth, should I be the blind fowl pecking at a grain of oats, instead of the pearl. Is the Act of Renunciation ready? Of course you have brought it with you? Give it here. To-day, to-morrow, or as long as my life lasts, you will receive from me but the one answer, ‘I will sign it.’”

“Let us agree to delay the decision, your Highness. The subject in question is no child’s play; nor is it the fighting down any youthful love affair. Let your Imperial Highness weigh well what you are renouncing—the nineteen crowns of Russia! Ivan Alexievitch’s crown inlaid with its nine hundred brilliants; the simple ‘cap’ of Peter the Great; the Novgorod crown with the Deissus; the crown of the Republic, worn by Ruric; the Astrachan cap of Michael Feodorvitch; the Siberian hat of Fedor Alexievitch; lastly, the ancient, most sacred relic, the crown of Monomachos, which dates from legendary times. And would my illustrious chief renounce all this splendour for the sake of a woman’s charms?”

Here the conversation was interrupted by the

entrance of Chevalier Galban ; who appeared in the doorway humming a ballet air.

“ Well, Galban,” shouted the Grand Duke, as he appeared, “ how do you like the Belvedere ? ”

“ Grand ! ” returned the Chevalier, “ and moreover an *impregnable fortress !* ” The two last words were directed to Araktseiff, accompanied with a meaning look. Possibly the Grand Duke intercepted it, for with sharp intonation he repeated—

“ An impregnable fortress ? I did not know that you concerned yourself with the storming of fortresses among other things.”

“ Oh yes,” retorted the Chevalier, in a tone equally sarcastic. “ I have had the good fortune to succeed in storming <sup>“</sup>many a castle, hitherto held to be impregnable.”

Araktseiff here cut short the allegory by interposing abruptly—

“ I know the castles in the taking of which you have won your spurs—Château Lafitte and Château Margot ! ” at which the Grand Duke, with a laugh, rose from the table.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE BLIND HEN'S GENUINE PEARL.

WHAT had Chevalier Galban found so admirable on the terrace of Belvedere Castle ; and what did he find so impregnable there ? . . .

In truth, a lovely view ! In the foreground the massed trees of Lazienka forest, clad in the tender hues of spring's young green, their colours ranging from the pale gold of the maple to the reddish purple of the sumach, delighted the eye. From amidst the thick foliage arose the zinc roofs of John Sobieski's ancestral home, Lazienka Castle. Red and green roofs of luxurious villas peeped out here and there from among the trees ; rows of silvery poplars overowering the rest marked out cross roads. In the distance the ancient capital of Poland ; living heart of a dead body ; the terraces of the once Royal Castle showing where its gardens had been ; on the Gothic towers of St. John's Church the golden crosses glistening. Below the city, the winding Vistula, its islands ablaze with springtide glory. To the right the great Belian forest, with its ancient Camaldolite Monastery, its walls glowing in the light of the evening sun ; and then, dumb witness to so many an historic event, the great Wolja plain, where formerly kings were elected. On the horizon, fast disappearing in the golden haze of evening, the outline of a castle ; Mariemont, whilom residence of Marie Sobieski.

"A lovely view, is it not ?" said Johanna to Chevalier Galban ; as, having reached the highest

terrace of Belvedere, they let their eyes wander round.

"A magnificent prison," returned the Chevalier.

Johanna looked in astonishment at him with her large brown eyes which, neither dazzling nor enticing, were full of soul.

"A prison—for whom?" she asked, surprised.

"For a saint and martyr, who is ready to sacrifice herself for her nation."

"And who may this be, and wherein her sacrifice? I do not understand you."

"Truly, it is not martyrdom to be tortured with red-hot iron, if that torture be borne in patience; but it is martyrdom to give one's heart to be tortured in a manner more cruel than man's imagination has yet conceived. And to be torn in pieces by a wild beast is not so ghastly a death, as to kiss and embrace such a monster. Such a sacrifice could only be conceived by a Polish woman, and for the Polish nation!"

"Either I fail to understand you, or you are labouring under some mistake," returned Johanna, handing the Chevalier a cup of fragrant Mocca, as they seated themselves.

Chevalier Galban was a practised strategist at such storming operations. He knew at once where the fortress was weakest.

"Duchess! Wherever the name of the Polish Viceroy is heard, that of Johanna Grudzinska is named also with adoration and affection, for she is the guardian angel of all who are oppressed and afflicted."

"I know nothing of all this. Here only criminals are punished; and *such* punishment I can do nothing to hinder."

"Perhaps not in words; perhaps only unconsciously. Yet the whole world knows that Poland's terror has changed under the magic of your influence. He has sane periods in which he treats his people with clemency. And for these, Poland has to thank you!"

"Herr Galban! Do you not see that any praise must be repugnant to me which reflects upon my husband?"

"Far be it from me, in any way, to reflect upon the Czarevitch, my master. He is, as nature and circumstances have made him. The ruling of a nation is no poetry, nor is it a matter of scriptural teaching; it has its established laws. Diplomacy is heartless; and a thorough-going statesman must be heartless likewise! Every one knows that the Czarevitch is a tyrant to his subjects."

"But to me he is my husband, to whom I am bound by every law of love and duty."

"It is just that which makes my blood boil. I can talk openly to you. I must confess, when I undertook the mission entrusted me by Araktseieff, I had conceived a very different idea of you from what I do now that I am face to face with you. In the different courts I have visited, I have come across many ladies who have deluded themselves into the belief that the love of crowned heads is quite another thing from the love of ordinary mortals. Once their mistake found out, they have been able to console themselves; and when higher State interests have demanded the sacrifice of their affections, they have accepted the title of countess or princess, with its accompanying estate as compensation, and have survived it."

"But what analogy is there between their and my position? I was solemnly married to my husband. At the altar I first placed my hand in his. I bear his name; and I know he loves me truly."

"Ah, Princess, you have no conception at present of the heartless nature of diplomacy! What you say is perfectly true; but you certainly did not notice that in the marriage ceremony the priest placed the Grand Duke's left—not his right—hand in yours. This was no treachery, no deception; it is customary with princes of the blood, and their wives and children can hold up their heads without shame. But—and here comes in the infamy—Araktseieff is set upon

proclaiming the Grand Duke as the Czar's successor to the throne, because he is his ideal. But to this end it is imperative that the Grand Duke should take back his first wife, who is still living, *and who is a member of a reigning dynasty*; for the fundamental laws of the empire allow no other woman to ascend the throne. Do you now see the fate awaiting you?"

"However hard it be, I will endure it silently."

"You will be deprived of your husband's name; and as Count Grudzinski cannot give you back his, you will be made Princess of Lovicz. Can you not now picture to yourself what your future lot will be?"

"Patience and resignation!"

"Did you not notice the cruel smile on Araktseieff's face as, when kissing your hand, he said, 'The sight of this happiness reminds me of *mine*'? By that he intended to put you on a par with the woman called Daimona, who is only his paramour, and was a *vivandière*."

"I do not feel the intended insult."

"No, no; it is impossible! When I heard the scheme, I too thought, After all, what will it matter? She, like other women, will receive compensation, and, like them, will—survive it. But since I have been brought face to face with those clear, pure eyes, which so faithfully mirror the noble heart within, I ceased to consult my reasoning powers, for they counselled me to take myself a hundred miles away, and to make myself believe that I had been dreaming. Since that moment I have been pondering how—at the risk of my own life—I could save you. It must not be that such an angel should fall a victim to such devilish intrigues! It must not be that a Polish woman be forced to see her father's name and coat of arms tarnished without any one to protect her—without means of revenge!"

"What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? To tell you how you can revenge yourself! You must anticipate those intriguers, and, in answer to their dishonouring proposal,

say, 'Keep your princedom of Loviccz for high-born courtesans. I, a Polish noblewoman, will find a husband ready to give me the protection of his honourable name and whole heart—a true man, who loves and respects me!'

Face, eyes, the Chevalier's dramatic action, all tended to illustrate his words. It was not difficult for Johanna to divine whom he meant as the "true man." Not the shadow of a blush tinted her cheek as, with greatest composure, she replied—

"Chevalier Galban, do you see those walls surrounding Belvedere and Lazienska? Within them you are my guest, and you have the right to do exactly as you please, even to the length of insulting me—but only within these walls, and as my guest. As soon, however, as you are without them, your immunity ceases. I will confide to no one what you have just said to me. A Polish woman does not betray even to her husband; she revenges herself! So, for this unpardonable insult, once you have passed without these walls, I will order my people to give you a sound thrashing! May I offer you a little more sugar in your coffee?"

Chevalier Galban burst into a peal of laughter.

"*Ma foi!* the fate of war. Out of three assaults, one may come off conqueror twice, and yet be beaten the third time. Thank you, I will take another piece of sugar."

Then he strolled out with Johanna into the park, admired her tulip-bed, and, deferentially taking leave of her, went back to his chief, as already related.

"Where did you leave my wife?" the Grand Duke asked, as he rose from table.

"I accompanied her into the park. We parted at the Hermitage."

"Come, Araktseieff, let us go and find her! You take one way; I will take the other. Whoever first finds her, brings her back to Belvedere."

The Grand Duke was lucky. He was first to find Johanna. She was kneeling on the grass feeding her

pet rabbits ; he let himself down clumsily beside her.

"Take care !" he said, "the grass is wet with dew ; you will take a chill."

"It will not hurt me—I am strong."

"That's a story," he growled, "you are very delicate. I do not know how to wait the season to send you to Ems ; that you may take the baths for which you are longing."

"I do not want to go there now."

"Why not ?"

"I have been thinking it over. You would be unable to leave your post to go with me—and to be weeks—months away from you, not ever to see you, is more than I could bear. I would so much rather stay here. Indeed I am quite well."

"What !" cried the Grand Duke, with a wild outburst of joy. "You love me so much that you cannot live without me ? that you would care for nothing if you were away from me ? Oh, my own true pearl of women ! " And taking up his wife in his strong arms he laughed, caressed, and covered her with a shower of fiery kisses. "And they would separate me from my wife ! A fine idea, eh ? Shall I throw you into this pond ? " And he swung her in his arms like a little child. "Are you afraid that I shall throw you in ? Ha, ha, ha ! —and do you think I would let them make you Princess of Lovicz, and be parted from you ? That I would repay you for your love and faithfulness with a title, and take another to wife ? Are you afraid of it ? Shall I toss you into the pond ? Hush ! "

Johanna twined her arms round her husband's neck, kissed him, and murmured softly—

"Were you to dishonour me and chase me from you, I would come back to you again. Were you to humiliate me from your wife into your mistress or maid-servant, I would still serve and love you. I cannot do otherwise."

"Ha, ha, ha ! And from such a woman they

would have torn me! Hallo! Araktseieff! This way, man. I've found her."

When Araktseieff, turning into the winding path, caught sight of the Grand Duke with Johanna in his arms, he knew what had happened.

"Tell them," shouted the Czarevitch when he was still at some distance, and in a voice hoarse with emotion—"tell them that *I do not give up a wife who loves me for a whole empire that hates me!* When are you and your Chevalier Galban going back?"

"With your Imperial Highness's permission, I will stay the night. But Chev'lier Galban has left the castle already, I see from a note he left for me. He says he was compelled to hasten his ~~departure~~; the ground was burning ~~under~~ his feet, for Duchess Johanna had threatened him with a horse-whipping for a speech which had displeased her."

"A horse-whipping!" cried the Grand Duke. "What! my Johanna order any one to be horse-whipped? *Come on my right hand, wife!*" And releasing Johanna from the embrace in which he still held her, he offered her his right arm, with face beaming with joy.

"Go back to those who sent you, my good friend, and tell them that I am about to wed Princess Lovicz in right-handed marriage. And as she may not accompany me to St. Petersburg, I will go with her to Ems, with the Czar's permission. And now get ready your trumpery papers that I have to sign."

With these words he turned away; and what he had further to say to Johanna was inaudible from kisses and laughter.

That which Krizsanowski had promised in the sitting of the Szojusz Blagadenstoiga, had come about. The incredible fact that a man could voluntarily resign his succession to the throne of the mightiest empire in the world, and in such a manner, that did he ever repent, he might never undo his act—that incredible fact had become not a ~~possibility~~, but a thing accomplished. The solution to the riddle was,

as Zeneida had divined at the time, Johanna. For the present, however, none knew of it save the participants and the trees of the ancient forest about them.

Ah! what a terrific world-wide catastrophe was this idyll to bring about.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A RULER MIGHTIER THAN THEM ALL.

WHILE the associates of the "green book" were at work on their widespread plans, the ~~members~~ of the "Bear's Paw" had been plotting in a very different way. Passing over the military, and turning their backs upon the league of the aristocrats, they took up ground of their own; calling themselves "Napoleonists!" What induced them to choose that extraordinary name?

Well! it is easy enough to make the poor believe their lot to be a hard one; it was at that time that the Russian Volkslied was written—

"My soul I give to God;  
My head I give the Czar;  
My body belongs to my master;  
The grave is all I call my own!"

Within the last four years especially the iron hand of adversity had pressed heavily on the country. The earth no longer gave back the seed sown; terrific fires had reduced the large cities to ashes; and a pestilence, hitherto unknown in the land, had crept over the frontier and devastated the population. The streams and rivulets had become floods, carrying away whole towns at a moment's notice; locusts, caterpillars of a kind and species never seen before, came down in swarms, tormenting man and beast; great warships out at sea sank with all their men and ammunition on board.

And all this was Heaven's retribution because the

Czar had not gone to the assistance of the Greeks, fighting for their freedom. Against miracles, counter-miracles alone can be effectual.

And the present century had produced a miracle in the form of a man: his name, Napoleon.

It was a lie that the English had taken him prisoner at Waterloo! A lie that he was being kept in confinement on the island of St. Helena. He was in hiding, though the whereabouts must not at present be divulged. Where was that place? Only so much might be known, that it was somewhere in the neighbourhood of Irkutsk. Thence he would come, as soon as the people's cup of bitterness was filled to the brim, to tread down the mighty, and free every nation under the sun.

This rumour was widely circulated. Among the conspirators of the "Bear's Paw" was a plaster modeller (our "Canova") who, single handed, sent out of his workshop over two hundred thousand busts of Napoleon. These busts were worshipped by the mujiks as if they were pictures of saints; they took the place of the crucifix to them. He was the deliverer, before whom the mujik and his family bent the knee; he would bring them relief from all their troubles.

Even at the present time these plaster casts are to be seen in many a Russian peasant's hut, the well-known form, cocked hat, arms crossed upon the breast, in overcoat, or short-waisted military tunic. Forty years after his death they still awaited his coming.

Hence the words, "Only wait till Napoleon comes," was a cry which spread through the land.

The people remembered that twelve years before, when Napoleon really did come, their masters were terribly frightened, and so merciful to the peasants. How fast they cleared out, leaving their castles as booty behind! And money then was as plentiful as blackberries. No price was high enough for corn and oats. And such brilliant promises were scattered about in all directions. The mujik was led to expect

everything under heaven and earth ; but his expectations were never realized. So let Napoleon come again !

And to hasten this was the plan of the leader of the "Bear's Paw" party.

The 8th of November, according to the Russian Calendar, is the Feast of the Archangel Michael. On that day it is the custom to have great rejoicings in Isaacplatz and on the Neva. The whole population of St. Petersburg, from the highest to the lowest, take part in it. Now when the throng should be at its thickest, and aristocrat and plebeian well mixed up together, suddenly at the corner of every street, and every square, there should arise the cry, "Here comes Napoleon !" And in the midst of the crowd, borne on the shoulders of the enthusiastic people, should appear the well-known figure of the Corsican hero—to be represented by Dobujoff, one of the "Bear's Paw" community, a man, the very image of the great Napoleon, and an admirable mimic. The rest would follow of itself. At the words, "Napoleon has come!" all St. Petersburg would be at their mercy, and the wave, thus started, would not stop until it reached Novgorod, where the brotherhood of "Ancient Republic" would at once swell the tide, overflowing Moscow, and all that ventured to oppose it. They looked upon their plan as sure of success. The people may suffer themselves to be deprived of freedom, even of bread, but no one may deprive them of their amusements. With the days set apart as holidays, no power on earth may meddle. The plan of campaign was devised cunningly enough. Every one having anything to do with "the classes" was carefully excluded. And one other circumstance was favourable to the audacious originators. The Neva, that year, had frozen over in October, a succession of hard frosts had followed, but no snow, whilst ordinarily, in November, house roofs were covered a foot deep in snow, which lasted into May. It would be therefore no difficult task to set fire to the City in various

quarters, a thing not usually so possible in the winter in St. Petersburg as in Moscow, built as it was almost entirely of wooden houses. With fire breaking out in ten or twelve places simultaneously, the panic would be complete.

The feast of St. Michael was at that time still celebrated in the Isaacplatz. In one night, in the vast, usually empty space, a perfect town had been erected, with entire streets of booths, the principal booth being the People's Theatre. And what a theatre it was! in which marionettes acted like real people, and fought in real battles! And then the troops of artistes of all kinds, whose patron is not Apollo, but Pan, who amuse the people, and are not at the beck and call of the rich and learned, but are to be seen at fairs and in holiday places, and who do not think it beneath their dignity to come down among the crowd to collect kopecs after the performance. Then there are the people's favourites, the Bajazzos, who are not so ambitious as to work for posterity, but are perfectly content if they can earn to-day their yesterday's score at the inn, playing the while, so the populace think, every whit as well as Talma or Macready. They eat tow, draw whole bundles of rags out of their noses, swallow red-hot coals and sharp swords, and can scratch their ears with their toes, which is more than either Sullivan, Kean, or even Dimitrievsky, more celebrated than either, can do. In one booth is shown the "real original sea-maiden with a fish's tail, who lives on live fish, and can say, 'Papa,' 'Mama.'". In another, the big drum is being beaten to call attention to the elephants walking on a tight-rope; next door to them are to be seen men of the woods, with four hands and tusk-like teeth. The giantess is also on view, under whose arm the tallest man can stand, although she wears no high heels to her shoes, and when desired, shows that the calfs of her legs are not waddled. The showman of a panorama describes in singing voice to an astonished public, great battles,

eruptions of Vesuvius, storms at sea, and ghastly tales of murders, the faithful representation of all which is to be seen in his booth for the sum of two kopecs. Then how endless are the amusements hidden by no jealous tent. Here a group of cornet players, each playing a different note, and so forming a melody ; there a set of gipsies dancing and singing ; windmill-like swings swishing through the air with their delighted occupants ; whilst crowds in their holiday best glide over the smooth ice in sledges, or on skates. High above all these earthly delights is to be seen a rope slung across between the tower of St. Isaac's Cathedral to the balcony of the Admiralty, upon which a tight-rope dancer is to wheel his little son in a wheelbarrow.

Wild spirits reign among the crowd ! The Samovars are inexhaustible with their supplies of hot tea, and epicures who know how to enjoy life, swallow mountains of sweet ices, and salt cucumbers immediately after. The people listen to Volkslied singers, and join in with them ; while those who have brought their three-sided balalaikas with them accompany the voices, no very difficult art, as it is an instrument with only two strings.

And it is not only a day for "the masses ;" the "classes" are there also in all their magnificence. True, every precaution has been taken to prevent "the masses" from encroaching upon their betters. To this end the Summer Garden is enclosed, and there the world of fashion is to be seen driving in every variety of equipage, from the *barouche* to the national *Proledotki*, the owners exhibiting their costly furs and running Bolognese dogs.

The frozen Neva, open to all, is alive with thousands and thousands of sledges, from smart gilded ones with their English thoroughbreds, to those of simple Lapland construction drawn by reindeer, crossing and recrossing each other on the polished surface of the river. The Northern Babel is in full force.

As evening comes on, the terrace of the pavilion is

illuminated with Bengal lights, and huge pitch bon-fires spring into flame, showing up the animated picture of the people's feast in varied colouring.

After the fireworks, three salvos of cannon from the citadel give the signal for the bells in all the churches to begin ringing in honour of St. Michael.

These three salvos, and ringing of church bells, are to serve as a signal to the conspirators. At the first sound they are to rush forward, armed with knives and torches, with the cry, "Napoleon is here! Here is Napoleon!" When, under cover of the noise of the pealing bells, they have forced a way into the midst of the aristocrats and soldiers, it will be easy for them in the universal chaos to push on to the palace, and murder him of whom the "Song of the Knife" was written.

The thing was plain, a foregone conclusion. That afternoon a strong south-west wind from the sea had sprung up, to the discomfort of many. True, the St. Petersburger is accustomed, if one fur coat be not sufficient, to put on two; but the poor performers suffered much damage from the wind, which blew down their booths and stopped their performances. The tight-rope dancer dared not venture upon his neck-breaking exhibition, for the storm would have carried off him and his son bodily like a couple of flies. Aristocratic ladies in the enclosure lamented that the wind tore their veils off their bonnets. Greater still were the lamentations anent the fireworks, for none but Bengal lights and wheels could succeed on such a night.

Towards evening the gale rose to a perfect hurricane. Suddenly came the roar of the cannon from the citadel, and simultaneously the peal of bells. Three hundred bells at one and the same time! A carillon truly!

The roar of the cannon deadened the bells. It is the people's habit to count the salvos. Three were the signal for the lighting up of the Bengal lights.

But the cannon thundered on.

When the reports had reached twenty-one, people whispered under their breath, "What? can it be the birth of a princess in the Winter Palace?"

No. Still the cannons thundered on.

At the fiftieth report, the rumour arose that a successful naval engagement was being celebrated.

But still the cannons continued their volley, amidst the crash of church bells.

When the iron tongue had roared for the hundred and first time, people began to ask themselves, "Can this be the Czar's birthday?"

No; not even that. The iron monsters thundered on: 102, 103, 104. At the 105th time none asked any more what it meant. For the whole city with one voice sent up a despairing cry, deadening even the crash of the three hundred bells.

"It is coming! It is coming!"

But it was not the approach of Napoleon's army which aroused the voice of panic, but that of a far mightier foe—the Neva! which, rushing back upon the city, brings the sea with it, and with foaming, roaring, resistless waves breaks up the ice of the river, flinging it abroad on all sides.

That was the meaning of the incessant firing of cannon from the citadel.

When Czar Peter the Great first began to put into form his idea of building a capital in the midst of the Finnish morass, and, to that end, had the vast forest there standing exterminated, he came upon an ancient fir-tree, on whose bark were cut deep lines. "What is the meaning of these lines?" he asked an old countryman. "*These lines denote the height of the Neva when it leaves its banks, and floods the whole surrounding land.*" The Czar gave orders for tree and peasant to be cut down; but both had spoken truly. The Neva remained the sworn enemy of the mighty city of the Czar.

Yes. It is rushing on with backward movement ; it has left the river bed, and increases mightily in volume ; it is no longer the Neva, but the sea—the salt sea in all its awful immensity ! And when it has subsided, the walls of palaces and houses, as far as the water has reached, will be crystallized with salt.

Those sledging on the ice were the first to become aware of the extent of the danger. Such as took refuge on the right bank of the river might esteem themselves lucky, for there the streets were clear ; but those seeking the left side spread mad panic among the unconscious throng of pleasure-seekers with their cry, “ The Neva is coming ! ”

The very words sufficed to strike dismay into the hearts of the bravest, and to paralyze the cowardly with terror. For in such danger there is no way of escape. When the Neva rises, it overflows the whole city, and he who would flee the danger meets it at the next turning.

Confusion reigned supreme. The crowds of carriages in the railed-in “ Summer Garden ” had but one way of egress, and collision was inevitable ; those which at last forced a passage came into the midst of a maddened press of people, who carried them along, regardless of the crest upon the panels, and the supercilious lackey on the box. There were for the time being no princes and no mujiks, only a panic-stricken mob. And before disentanglement was possible, the flood was upon them.

The first huge wave washed down the booths in Isaacplatz. The terrified owners came rushing out of the beerhouses, and, clambering on the tops of their dismantled booths, shrieked for help. The giantess pushed head and shoulders out of her tent, frightened to death. Boys dressed like performing apes, flew up their poles ; the sea maiden found her feet, and, discarding tail, made for dry land. The performing elephant waddled through the crowd, his master on his back ; and the wild beasts in the menagerie roared as if they were in their native

forests. At that instant, as though in mockery of this scene of terror, the red and green lights on the terrace of the Summer Garden Pavilion shone forth, lighting up the flood in all its horror. The men in charge of the fireworks were ignorant of what was happening. Only when the festive peals of bells had died away in distant reverberations did they become aware of their danger ; and hastily putting out their lights, left the whole city in darkness. For the slippery pavements impeded the lamplighters ; nor, indeed, could they have lighted their lamps in the storm that was raging. Darkness added the final touch of horror to the scene of danger !

Among the terrified refugees was Duchess Ghedimina and Bethsaba ; their carriage, in Russian style, drawn by two horses tandem. The first horse was well-nigh unmanageable ; it was a spirited English mare, which the Duchess had specially chosen that day to show that her equipage was superior to Zeneida's. Only she had not attained her aim, for Fräulein Ilmarinen had not entered an appearance.

"Drive down one of the side streets," the Duchess said peremptorily to her coachman.

Easy to command, but not so easy to carry out ! The mob surrounded them on all sides.

"Get down !" she ordered her jäger, " and force a way through the people."

The jäger, a gigantic young fellow, a Finlander, seized the foremost horse by the bridle, and dealing out blows roundly with his other arm on the mujiks, thought to steer the carriage in this way through the crush. All very well ; that kind of thing may do with the mujik, who is accustomed to the lash ; but your thoroughbred has noble blood in his veins, and does not suffer himself to be led by the bridle. Violently shaking himself loose, the horse dealt the jäger such a blow on the head that he fell senseless to the ground.

"Oh, what are we to do now ?" asked the Duchess, terror-stricken, and bursting into tears.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE DEVIL.

SUDENLY a glow of light illumined the dark waves ; a red gleam, reflected on the street of houses, was seen advancing towards them. From a side street a boat approached, with a torch stuck in its bow. Two men were pulling, a third, boathook in hand, was staving off the floating masses of ice, a fourth was at the rudder. In the middle of the boat stood a woman, her head and face entirely enveloped in a bashlik, engaged in covering up a group of children of all ages, distributing biscuit, and soothing their cries for papa and baba (little Russian children say "baba" instead of mamma). Papa and baba do not take the children to the fair, but lock up the poor little mites in the houses before they go out. If any sudden calamity occurs, papa and baba escape. But what becomes of the little ones ? Does a fire break out, they are burnt to death ; a flood, then let Providence send some good-natured gentle-folk, such as take pleasure in rescuing children through roof or windows. It is as good sport as wild-duck shooting. So this boat was filled to overflowing.

The boatmen saw the desperate position of the carriage and its occupants, and they rowed towards it. The torch showered sparks in the high wind, illuminating the face of the youth who, as he stood in the prow of the boat as it glided over the dark waters, looked like some hero of antiquity. Masses

of ice grated under the keel. The young man, steering dexterously through the ice, reached the carriage. It was but just in time, for Bethsaba could scarce maintain her seat upon the horse. Without a second's hesitation he seized the half-frozen girl, who clutched with both hands at his arm, and the next instant she was in the boat.

Bethsaba looked into the youth's eyes, and in that moment she knew the exquisite joy of losing one's self in a look. Once before she had met the fire of those eyes—then they had singed her wings; now her heart was the victim.

"Wrap her in this fur cloak," said the lady, standing in the middle of the boat, to the young man, throwing her wrap to the girl, who was shivering with cold; then going alongside the carriage, she held out her hand to help the lady sitting in it into the boat. As she did so, the bashlik fell back, and Bethsaba recognized the face. It was that of Zeneida Ilmarinen—the Devil! The Duchess also recognized her.

Like a fury she struck back her enemy's helping hand, crying, in a voice hoarse with passionate excitement—

"Away, away! I will not have your help! Rather perish in the flood than in hell with you!" And snatching the whip from her coachman's hand, she administered some smart lashes to the horses, who, madly rearing, plunged deeper into the foaming waves, already up to their chests. She would have none of Zeneida's help.

Bethsaba remained in the boat, trembling, not with cold, but at the thought that she had fallen into the devil's clutches, who, already, was making off with her as his prey. Of course he had given her his own fur wrap, in order to secure his hold. How warm the cloak was! It must come direct from the lower regions.

"You will take cold," said the man with the boat-hook to Zeneida.

"I will row to keep myself warm," she answered; and, taking an oar in her firm grasp, began rowing vigorously, her chest heaving with the exertion, as does the devil's when hastening off with his prey. Of course he takes all the little children he can get hold of to hell. The boat flew like the wind down the dark lanes.

At length they came to a large garden, the high walls of which kept back the seething waters. Bethsaba recognized the gilded railings that surrounded them. It was here the stag had been shot that they were hunting last spring. The evil spirit was bringing her to his lair.

The boat pulled up at the very threshold of the castle, for the water covered the marble steps. But the castle itself was built on such high ground that it was secure from all inundation.

The hall was brilliantly lighted, and an army of liveried footmen with lighted lamps hastened out to receive the party. From one end of the long ball-room to the other rows of beds were placed, and in the centre of the room stood a table spread with food and steaming samovars. A number of beds were already occupied by children; another group were in the act of being fed with tea and soup. Bethsaba recognized many well-known faces among the helpers. They were those of members of the Society of the Green Book, who had been utilizing the Feast of St. Michael to hold a sitting, for that is one of the days when the attention of the police is otherwise engaged. Scarce had the sitting begun, when Pushkin had burst in among them with the alarming news that the Neva had overflowed its banks.

The common danger at once put politics, new constitutions, and conspiracy out of their heads. Their one thought was to save those imperilled.

In Zeneida's grounds was an immense fish pond, on which her guests were wont to hold regattas in the spring. In winter boats and punts were laid up in the boat-houses. These were got out in all haste,

the conspirators told off to them, with oars and boat-hooks, and they were rapidly scattered in all directions to carry help to the inundated city; their first work to rescue the children out of endangered houses, and those women who had stayed at home with them. Zeneida placed her castle, staff of servants, and wardrobe at the disposal of the rescuing party; but the lion's share of the work fell to her, and she gave herself heart and soul to it. She herself carried the young Circassian Princess in her arms into a well-warmed apartment hung with rich tapestries. Bethsaba had not strength to resist; she suffered herself to be carried like a baby. Besides, what is the use of resistance to the Prince of Darkness?

First Zeneida cut away and removed the frozen clothing from Bethsaba's numbed body—so does the Evil One with his prey! Here the king's daughter experienced a sensation of surprise, for she was accustomed to bathe very often with Korynthia, who never failed to admire her form, and to say to her god-daughter, "How lovely you are!" But Zeneida instead, with frowning brow, as if angry, clothed her rapidly in a woollen garment, then commenced rubbing her limbs vigorously until the numbness yielded, and a pleasant sense of warmth was infused into her frame. Afterwards wrapping her in well-warmed blankets, she laid Bethsaba in a deliciously soft bed, and covered her up. Yes, so the Evil One treats his poor victims before he takes them to the nether regions!

Then Zeneida brought a steaming draught in a delicate porcelain cup, from which Bethsaba, taking one sip, felt warmed through as though with fire. This must certainly be the devil's potion! And having once tasted it she wanted more, and did not stop until she had emptied the cup. Then her eyes closed, and fiercely as she resisted it, sleep overpowered her. In her dreams the Prince of Darkness led her through fairy-like places which, narrow at first, widened out further and further until they

changed into one great Paradise, where people flew about instead of walking. Once in her dreams she saw the Evil One, gently attending to her wants and removing her saturated garments. And next morning, when she awoke, true enough her coverings had been changed. If that was no dream, were the other dreams equally true?

Bethsaba, sitting up in bed, looked about her. Yes; it must be the Evil One's room. No image of a saint to be seen; only Chinese and Japanese idols of every form and shape. Most likely images of Beelzebub!

But what was most astonishing, was to find her clothes folded on a low chair by her bedside. How could that be? Last night the Spirit of Darkness had certainly cut and torn them to shreds; and now here they were, whole and dry. Certainly he has numberless agents who can work magic! Timorously she put on the mysterious clothing, not failing to ejaculate a "Kyrie eleison!" at each garment, in order to dispel the power of the Evil One.

And when thus dressed, she tried to find her way out of the room she was in. Two or three of the apartments she passed through were very unlike those of her godmother, rich Princess as she was. One of them was full of living birds; another of stuffed animals. Suddenly she heard a whimpering of children. This must be the place where the Evil Spirit tortures the little ones he has stolen. Curiosity made her follow the voices, and advancing she came to a half-open door, where, looking in, she saw Zeneida occupied in washing, combing, and dressing a group of tiny children. Some, who were being washed, were whimpering; but others already dressed were chattering, and admiring their pretty new frocks. Surely an odd occupation for the Evil One! They were in Zeneida's bath-room. Bethsaba boldly entered. Curiosity begets courage.

"Ah, dressed already, little Princess?" said Zeneida.

"What are you doing to the children?" asked Betsaba, with desire for knowledge.

"As you see, washing and dressing them; one cannot tell where their mothers may be, poor little mites. The flood is rising higher and higher; the whole city is under water. As long as the danger lasts we must look after these little ones. Those who dress quickly," continued she, turning to the children, "may run into the dining-hall, and the housekeeper will give them some nice soup for breakfast."

Bethsaba thought she would put the Evil One to the proof.

"But who hears them say their prayers before their breakfast?"

"Nobody, dear child; for they are more hungry than devout."

"But prayer is good," returned the king's daughter.

"For what?"

"In order to avert further misfortune from the city."

"My dear little Princess!" exclaimed Zeneida, "the wind which sends the Neva over St. Petersburg is called *Auster*, and were the whole twelve hundred millions of people who inhabit the earth to blow together, their efforts would not avail to blow back the *Auster*!"

This was a speech worthy of its maker. To liken the efficacy of prayer to a blowing of breath! Betsaba now plunged into the extreme of audacity. She would name the Deity, and surely then the Devil, amid sulphur and brimstone, would strip himself of his seductive exterior and appear in his conventional form of horns and hoofs.

"So you do not believe that God has sent this awful calamity upon mankind?"

"No, dear child. For were it God who had sent this visitation upon the earth, the flood would have destroyed the houses of the wicked, and not those of honest, hard-working people."

Bethsaba thought: you must be he; or you would never have dared to utter such blasphemy. She went further; she wanted to catch the Evil One in his own net.

"You have too much to do; may I not help you? If you would let me, I would wash and dress the children, too. I should like to do it; it is so amusing.

"Yes, indeed," said Zeneida, merrily. "Why not? It will give you something to do; and I, by the way, must go and see that we have enough to eat for all our multitude. I leave you in charge of the nursery."

So saying, she gave up her seat to Bethsaba, and bidding the many unwashed little folk to be good, left the bath-room, with a smile. Bethsaba's first care was to make the children all kneel down. Then kneeling in their midst, she said the Lord's prayer with them: "Deliver us from the Evil One. Amen."

Now he must be effectually quashed!

Then she began her task of washing and dressing the little ones.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### STORY OF THE MAN WITH GREEN EYES.

BUT the small mites were not as good with their new nurse as they had been with the old one. A look from Zeneida had been enough to still their moanings and whimperings ; but Bethsaba was little more than a child herself, and they were not in the least awed by her. One child beginning, the others followed in chorus, "Where is baba, where is papa ?" and she might have gone on for ever washing the tears from the little faces.

Well, papa and baba she could not give back to them ; but she remembered what her nurses had done when she was a little child, and used to cry for her mother. They had told her fairy tales.

"Don't cry ! Be good and sensible, and I will tell you the story of 'The Man with the Green Eyes.' It's such a lovely story. Now, listen !"

The children were quiet as mice ; they clustered up to Bethsaba, clinging to her dress, resting their chins on her knees, and listened.

"A long, long time ago there was a little prince, as small as you are, Struvelpeter, here at my feet. He had a good papa, and a good baba, who loved him very much. But one day they had to go a long journey, and were laid in long metal boxes, the lids shut down upon them. Then they were carried out, placed upon two grand gold and silver coaches, each drawn by six horses, and amid bands of music, firing

of cannons, and great crowds of people, they were driven away.

"When the little prince was left alone, he asked his Grand Vizier, 'To what land did my father and mother go?'

"And the Grand Vizier answered, 'Ah, little prince, to a land far away. To another world.'

"'And why did they go to that other world?'

"'Because it is much better there than in ours!' the Vizier explained.

"Upon which the little king's son asked, 'If that world is so much better, why did they not take me with them?'

"'Because you have yet much to work, battle, and suffer in this world before you will be worthy to reach that other one, whither your father and mother went.'

"This admonition did not please the little prince at all, and he thought to himself, 'We'll see. I *will* get to papa and baba in the other world, whatever he may say!'

"And taking his little gun, he went out into the woods, as if to shoot birds. There he stayed so long that he was caught in a thunder shower; and to avoid getting wet, he looked about for a hollow tree to shelter in. He had found one, and was looking in, when he saw that some one was already there. Now, Struwpeter, what would you have done in such a case?"

"I should have cried out loud."

"Well, now, the little king's son did not do that; but, like a man, he spoke up to the intruder. 'I say, you fellow, this wood is my wood, and this tree is my tree, and I don't allow you to live in it. But if you can tell me where that better land is to which papa and baba have gone, I will make you a present of wood and tree, and you shall live in them.'

"And the stranger in the hollow tree answered, 'Not so, little king's son! I lived here before this wood existed, and no one has power to drive me

away. You want to know where the better land is? That I can only tell you when I love you, and you love me. Already I love you."

"But I don't love you, naughty man," said the little prince.

"Why not?" asked the wood sprite.

"Because you've got *green eyes*."

"The stranger's eyes, in truth, gleamed like two green beetles."

"Then Heaven be with you!" said the stranger; by which the little prince knew he was no evil spirit, else he dared not name the holy place.

"I'm going!" returned the little king's son; "and I will find the better land without you. I have often heard which way to take."

The little prince had often heard that far off, among the rocks, lived a fierce, bloodthirsty tiger, which had despatched many a huntsman and goat-herd to the other world. He would take him along too.

So he went on till he came to the wild beast's den. He knew it by the many human bones strewn about on the ground. The tiger was in his den; his growling could be heard without.

"Now, you obstreperous little man, would you have dared to go into his den?"

"Not even if my ball had fallen in!"

"Well, then, the king's son was more courageous. He shouted into the den 'Hallo! you tiger, come out. I am the king's son! Bear me at once across to the better land!'

The monster came slowly out of his lair, licking his bloody muzzle and striking his long tail against his haunches, and preparing to make a spring on the boy. (Don't cry, little snub-nose!) He did not gobble him up; for at that instant a gigantic snake darting out of a cleft in the rock, threw itself round the tiger, and encircling neck and body, bit the monster in the throat. The tiger uttered an awful roar, and wrestled with the snake on the ground. Now began a battle for life and death between the two

animals, until both together they fell down the rocky precipice. They had killed each other. The prince had to go home to his palace.

"On his way he met a huntsman, his bow and quiver slung on his back.

"That's an odd huntsman who shoots nowadays with bow and arrow," thought the little prince, looking straight into the man's eyes. *It was his old acquaintance with the green eyes.*

"You see you can't find the way to the better land unless you love me?" said he; and disappeared as if the earth had swallowed him up.

"We'll see," thought the little prince. "I have heard that there is a great sea, and that many people who go on that sea in ships have found the way to that land. Perhaps I may succeed in finding that big sea."

"So he commanded his Grand Vizier to fit out a great ship on the Black Sea for him; and in this he sailed to the country of the fire-worshippers, which had been the home of the prince's mother. The voyage out was propitious; but coming back they were caught in a terrific storm. It thundered and lightened, the sky grew quite dark, and as the flashes came and went, and the rifts of cloud opened, they could clearly see in the sky beyond the radiant angel host; and, in like manner, as the storm winds made clefts in the sea the sea-nymphs at the bottom became visible.

"At last!" thought the king's son. "Whether from above or below I shall find the way to the better land."

"The waves ran so high, they had already broken the ship's rudder; the man at the helm had been washed overboard; the ship was fast running on to a huge mass of rocks; there was no doubt but that it must inevitably go to pieces.

"At that moment the prince saw some one by the steering gear, a stranger, who began guiding the ship with an old-fashioned helm.

"That's an odd sort of man who thinks to steer this great ship with that old-fashioned gear!"

"Suddenly the storm ceased; sky and sea quieted down, the ship ran unharmed past the threatening rocky shore, and reached its homeward destination in safety."

"The little prince looked round for the stranger steersman, whom no one on board knew; but he, with a laugh said—

"You will not find the better land before you get to love me, eh?"

"And the little king's son, looking still more closely, recognized in him *the man with the green eyes*; but he disappeared as the sea had swallowed him up."

"And now the little prince began to be very angry.

"Can there be no road for me to the better land? Oh yes, there must be. I have heard that many a hero has found it on the battlefield."

"So he commanded his Grand Vizier, then and there, to declare war against the King of the Tartars."

"And the Grand Vizier, with his army, invaded Tartary; but its king was very powerful. He let the little prince's army go further and further into the heart of his country, then surrounded them on all sides."

"The Grand Vizier was frightened.

"We are lost, little king's son! The Tartar knows no mercy; he will either kill us, or make us slaves. His army is countless as an army of locusts."

"The little king's son exulted.

"Give the signal for attack at once, that it may be the sooner over."

"But the Grand Vizier was so frightened that he disguised himself as a common soldier, and hid himself, not daring to lead on his troops. So the whole army, becoming demoralized, were ready to lay down their arms to the enemy, when suddenly there appeared at their head an unknown general in a uniform they had never yet seen. His sword was like a flaming fire or a serpent. He encouraged the

men, and led them against the Tartars ; and scarce had the trumpets sounded for the attack before the King of Tartary advanced towards the prince, sword in hand, barefoot, in a raiment of goat's hair, and humbly offered him costly presents, beseeching peace. 'For' he said, 'I cannot fight. My soldiers are dying off by thousands ; they fall as they stand, their hands and feet writhing and convulsed.'

"And once more the prince recognized *the man with the green eyes* in the unknown general. This grieved him greatly. He began to see that, without his help, never could he find that land where his father and mother were. Thus he made up his mind to seek out the man with the green eyes in his hiding-place, and to tell him he loved him. He went and called him out of the hollow-tree. The man with the green eyes had a garment of tinder, a hat of tinder bound with green mildew ; his face was yellow as wax, his lips blue as mulberries.

"Well, dear child, do you love me at last ?" he asked the little king's son.

"Yes, yes ; I love you. Only show me, at last, the road to the better land."

"Never fear ! I will show it you. But first you must eat one of the plums from my basket, and kiss me."

"I must tell you he had a basket in his hand filled with plums, as waxen yellow as was his face. The little king's son took a plum and ate it.

"Now, just one kiss !" and he kissed him.

"Ugh ! how cold your lips were !" said the little prince, with a shudder.

"And by means of that one plum and that kiss, the king's son found what he had long sought so yearningly, the way to that better land where his father and mother were awaiting him. He is still there, and sends you his greetings."

While she told her story, the king's daughter had been busily combing the fair locks of a little girl, who with eyes and mouth wide open, took in every

word of the fable. When it came to an end she asked—

“And what is that other world?”

“Where good people live; where the sun ever shines, and it is perpetual springtime; where man labours, and every day is the Feast of St. Michael; where all people are glad and love one another; where none are hungry or thirsty; and where the children play with the baby angels.”

“Oh, I say,” quoth the little fair-haired maid, “if people must not eat or drink in the better land, I am sure papa and baba won’t go there!”

This set Bethsaba off laughing, as she covered the little speaker with kisses. Upon which there was a loud clapping of hands from the next room.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

“THEN YOU ARE NOT—?”

THE pretty story-teller had had listeners.

As the door opened, she perceived three well-known faces, those of Zeneida, Pushkin, her rescuer of the night before, and Jakuskin, the man at the helm of the boat. The two men were covered with mud; it was plain to see that they had just come in again from their work of mercy.

“We were listening to you,” said Zeneida, “Your audience were enchanted.”

“When I was travelling in the Caucasus,” said Jakuskin, “I chanced to hear that very fable. The man with the green eyes is the allegorical symbol of Caucasian fever, so rife there. The meaning of it is, that whoever has received the incubation of that fever, whether he be wounded in battle, mangled by wild beasts, or swallowed up by the sea, will meet no other death than that prepared for him by the green-eyed spectre!”

Bethsaba saw Pushkin standing before her. She gazed into those eyes, in which to look out one's very soul must be so sweet, and held out her hand to him.

“I have not yet thanked you for having saved my life. You came just in time. I could not have kept my seat an instant longer.”

“But how could the Duchess have allowed you to be there at all?” asked Pushkin, in tones of reproach.

“I begged her to let me do it. I was so sorry for

her, for she was ~~so~~ terrified, and even began to cry, a thing I could not stand. Do you know, did she reach home safely?"

"She is perfectly well. I called to ask. I assure you that my sole reason for going expressly to her palace to make inquiries was that I knew your first thought would be for her. There is nothing the matter. She went off at once last night in her boat to Peterhof, where she is in safety. She must have passed this very castle; but, of course, her only reason for not stopping to take you in was because she felt satisfied that you were in good keeping."

And Bethsaba saw no irony in the words; for, in truth, she felt quite happy in the place where she had those eyes to look into.

"And now I can give you nothing in return for having saved me, for I am so poor."

"Like me," returned Pushkin.

And Zeneida whispered in his ear—

"Oh, the boundless riches that would come from the union of your poverty!"

Bethsaba turned back to her washing apparatus.

"Please, let me go back to my work. Duty before everything!"

"Blessed be the hands that perform it!" said Pushkin.

And each word of his was music in Bethsaba's ears.

"Now I know that I love him," thought she to herself. "I am fully convinced of that. But does he love me?"

"We must now leave you," said Pushkin. "I only came to bring you news from Ghedimin Castle. We must be getting back. The flood is still rising; the whole of St. Petersburg is under water. There is no end of work for us to do; but we shall be coming to and fro many times in the course of the day. I shall have gifts to lay at your feet, dear princess."

Gifts! Did not her godmother tell her that the

Russian youth brings gifts to his lady-love? So, then—

“Gifts?” she asked with naïve joy, an innocent flush upon her pretty cheeks. “What kind of gifts?”

“Boatfuls of muddy, ragged children for you to wash and dress.”

The girl laughed, and clapped her hands with glee.

“Oh, that is capital! Do bring them—the more the better! That is the kind of gift I love.”

The two men, in their sailor's dress, all wet and muddy, hastened off.

“Pushkin,” said Zencida, accompanying him to the adjoining room, “that girl is Heaven-sent.”

“Since when have you believed in Heaven?”

“Be off with you! You are a goose! What news had you of Ghedimin?”

Pushkin shrugged his shoulders.

“He is at home, quite well. I saw him through the balcony window, but could not speak to him, as he did not open it. He is a good sort; spirited enough, too, when once he is put up to a thing, but with no self-reliance. He is fond of you, and is really anxious about you; but he knows that your palace is on sufficiently high ground to be out of danger, and that you have a host of friends to protect you. He is hospitable, and is generosity itself, and is certain to subscribe hundreds of thousands for the relief of the sufferers; yet he does not offer to take a soul into his own place, for fear of spoiling his carpets and floors; nor does he send out a cup of soup to them, because he has no wife to stand by him and encourage him in it. He is even philanthropic, yet fears to go out into the damplest he should get rheumatism. He is an incorporated ‘idea,’ and he knows it.”

“You are a ~~calumniator~~! I am convinced that he is ill.”

“He is certainly not ill unto death, or the Duchess would never have left him behind, and have gone alone to Peterhof.”

"Don't be in such a hurry! What of the Czar?"

"He is rowing about everywhere in his boat. Jakuskin, come here! You met the Czar; tell us about him."

"Oh, bosh!" returned the other, impatiently.

"Come, tell. Zeneida likes to hear these things."

"I have no secrets from her; she knows me through and through, and that I shrink from nothing. Last night in my boat I twice came upon the Czar; we were but an arm's length one from another. The torches of his bodyguard lit up his figure. He himself was lifting the weeping, raving people out of their windows—the very attitude for a pistol-shot! I had mine loaded in my pocket. I drew it out, and to escape temptation held it under water, to prevent its going off."

"Do you see, Jakuskin?" exclaimed Zeneida.

"Draw no conclusions from that. That I would not shoot him at the moment that he was helping his people is no proof that I have given up my plan. A deed of violence at such a time would have raised up all Christendom against the perpetrator. Let's have no sentiment. I merely let him go free from well-grounded self-interest. Now I will confess to you what I had not yet even confided to Pushkin. For the second time, and not by chance, I met the Czar at the Bear's Paw. Now the Bear's Paw is in that quarter of the town which unites one end of Unishkoff Bridge with Jelagnaja Street, a locality of whose existence St. Petersburg society has no idea. And Nevsky-Prospect, with its noble palaces, ends up into that labyrinth of squalor and misery. But it is out of the range of the carriage drive of the magnates—there the scum of Europe mixes with the refuse of Asia. And any catastrophe brings the refuse to the top. Our worthy friends must have been rather unpleasantly surprised by the Neva's unexpected performance; they had prepared one of another sort. The rising water washed them out

of their cellars into the attics. And they knew how to howl! When the Czar heard so many clamouring voices, he had his boat turned in their direction. I followed him at a distance, and saw him himself draw each several man out of the attic windows, and witnessed their humble subjection to him. I had to cram my fists into my mouth to prevent my laughter. The select company of the Bear's Paw was taken off by the Czar to the Winter Palace, and Herr Marat & Co. will have received a cup of 'kwas' broth from the imperial hands, and returned a teeth-chattering 'thanks.' But a very convulsion of laughter seized me when our friend Dobujoff, got up as Napoleon Bonaparte, crawled out of the shanty. The Czar exclaimed, '*Diantre! Est-ce que vous êtes retourné de Sainte Hélène?*' Upon which Napoleon had to confess that he understood no word of French. Now comes the catastrophe. Not by hand of man, but by means of a bit of wood. In front of the Bear's Paw, a tall pine staff had been erected, on the summit of which was stuck a pitch wreath. From this hung a line which had been steeped in saltpetre, and was evidently intended to have been lighted—probably as the signal. The masses of ice washing up against it had unsettled the staff; it began to totter, and must inevitably have crushed both the Czar and his boat's company, had not, fortunately, a man been near, who, perceiving their danger in time, seized the line with powerful grip, and swayed the staff round so that it fell beside the boat instead of upon it."

"That man was you!" exclaimed Zeneida.

"No matter! But this much I see, that a nobleman *cannot* be a common murderer. He is too fastidious about time and place. So to a more favourable opportunity!"

"One thing more," said Zeneida. "Did the Czar touch, too, at Petrovsky Garden?"

"No."

"All right. I will not detain you any longer."

The two men hastened down to their boat. Zeneida went back to Bethsaba. The princess had, by this time, dressed all the mujik children.

"Now, children," said Zeneida, "go prettily, hand in hand, to the winter garden ; there you will get your breakfast, and then you may play."

' Winter garden ! palm grove ! What sounds for poor children's ears !

Then turning to Bethsaba, she said—

"Now, dear little Princess, you remain here. Take a good hot bath ; it will do you good after your yesterday's exposure. I will be back in an hour. There is a bell ; ring for all you want."

Bethsaba's head was all confused. Everything was so new and strange to her.

A pleasant sense of fatigue stole over nerves and imagination after the bath. What a pity that there was no one here to whom she could confide her thoughts and feelings. It would have been so nice ! If only Sophie were here ! Ah, if she were here, there would be no further reason for alarm. Two young girls together are the very essence of heroism ! And now she began to wonder what could have happened to Sophie in this dread time. Had any one thought to go to her assistance ? had she listened to the alarm signals and thundering cannon with despair in her heart ? What tears she must have shed as she looked out of her windows at the rising expanse of icy water ! Bethsaba shuddered. Her excited fancy pictured her friend kneeling, with uplifted hands, before her holy images, imploring help. Would that prayer be answered ? Or was it but a faint breath, lost in the rushing of the Auster ?

Folding her hands, she prayed that help might be given to Sophie. Perhaps the combined prayer of two maidens might have greater efficacy. What a pity that there was no holy image in the room. She was forced to shut her eyes that some Bhuddist idol might not think she was addressing her prayer to him.

Thus Zeneida, on her return, found her.

"What, praying again, Princess? This is the time to be up and doing."

"But what can I do?"

"First of all, drink down this wine soup that I have brought for you. I want to ~~see~~ you quite well and strong again, for I want your aid."

"My aid?"

"Now sit down and take your breakfast, whilst I unfold my plan."

Bethsaba trembled. The thought of the dragon in the fairy story struck her, who ~~first~~ feasts the captured children on almonds and raisins, and then slays them. She could scarce get down her soup.

"I ~~daresay~~ you know that one-storied house standing in a garden, near the engineer's buildings, where a young girl and her old servant lie?"

Bethsaba lost not a syllable.

"According to water-mark measurements that house stands four cubits lower than this; hence the water which has encroached here to the castle steps has already flooded the ground floor, and is reaching up to the windows of the first storey, and the water is still rising. But one cubit more and it will be rushing through the windows in the first storey. Now, if the flood lasts another two or three days, which, unfortunately, is but too certain, that poor, delicate child will be in despair. Her only protector dare not go to her help on account of his high position; those he has sent have gone away without accomplishing their errand, for the girl is obstinate and mistrustful. She will not trust herself to strangers, for she dreads meeting the same fate as did Princess Tarrakonoff. There is therefore no other means of saving her from the endangered house than for you to come with us, for she loves and trusts you. On hearing your voice, she will readily let herself down from her balcony into the boat; then we will bring her here; and you can occupy the same room together whilst the danger lasts. You will not be alone in this anxious time, and she will feel comforted in

your society ; and, the time of peril happily over, we will drive her back to her home."

Bethsaba had forgotten her breakfast while Zeneida was speaking ; her eyes opened wider and wider, her cheeks rounded and flushed ; she laughed with tears in her eyes ; and as Zeneida finished she jumped up from her chair, and placing both hands on Zeneida's shoulders, looked trustfully into her eyes, as she joyfully said—

"Oh, then, you are not the devil !"

Zeneida broke into a peal of laughter.

"Who told you that I was ?"

"My godmother. But I see now that it was all a lie."

"It was only a manner of speaking. If one dislikes any one very much, one says that he or she is a devil."

"It was on account of the stag that my godmother was so angry with you, was it not ?"

"Yes ; for that."

"But she need not then have frightened me so by telling me that the devil looked just like you."

"Oh, little goose ! There is no such thing as a devil. Only that people like to ascribe their own wicked imaginings to an ideal being ; who, in reality, has nothing to do with the evil within them."

"But you are a real fairy, then ! For you read into my very soul, and how anxious I was about Sophie, and longing to see her. It was just for that that I was praying, that my darling little Sophie might be saved and brought here. And then you come in and bring me, like the message in the Gospel, the comforting answer : 'Go yourself and fetch her ! ' And do you still venture to affirm that there is no good in prayer ?"

"To those who believe it is good," replied Zeneida, kissing the girl's forehead ; upon which the latter, throwing her two arms lovingly round Fräulein Ilmarinen's neck, said—

"Let us say 'thou' to each other."

And they signed the compact with a kiss. Then joyously running to the table, Bethsaba drank her wine soup almost at a breath. There was a little left in the glass.

"That you must drink; I left it for you."

And the bond was sealed.

"I am quite ready; let us go," said Bethsaba.

"Wait just a few minutes. We will let the gentlemen get away first. We will go out by the garden gate, and take only one man to steer, and another for the boat-hook."

"Then we will row, won't we? I am accustomed to it, and strong as iron."

"It would be no use. The boat can only be sculled through the ice, especially against the current, and that will be done with the boat-hook."

"Well, I am still convinced that you are a good fairy, Zeneida. You will call me Betsi, won't you? And I must tell you that I am not at all frightened of good spirits. Oh, we have so many in home! Tamara is queen of them. For if you were not a fairy, how could you know that the flood was going to last two or three days longer?"

"There is no magic in that, dear little Betsi, for the barometer hanging over there against the wall is pointing to continued storms. Moreover, the city archives tell us that the danger always lasts several days when a south-west wind causes the Neva to overflow its bank."

"Well, that certainly is simple enough. So it was no prophecy? But then you said something else—that that gentleman, Sophie's only protector, could not go to her help. Now what barometer told you that?"

"Humph!" Zeneida, pressing her lips together, reflected for a moment, then said, "Do you know who that illustrious person is?"

"Of course I do. Why, how often I have met him at Sophie's, and have told him fairy tales! And Sophie has told me everything; things that no one

else knows anything about. But I will tell them to you, for people who love each other must have no secrets—don't you think so?"

"Certainly! Well, then, dear child, all this time that illustrious personage has been unable to go to Sophie, because, since the flooding of the greater Neva, it has been necessary for him to show himself wherever the danger was greatest, in order, by his presence, to stimulate others to the task of assistance, and to ensure success. Had he, instead of this, gone to Sophie, who lives on the lesser Neva, there would have been fearful rioting. Do you understand this?"

"Yes, indeed, I understand too well," returned Bethsaba, sorrowfully.

"But to-day they do not allow that illustrious personage to show himself in the inundated streets."

"Who?"

"His advisers."

"Why not?"

"Because they have discovered a plot against his life."

"Oh, how sad!" sighed Bethsaba. Then her mind flew to the last link of her chain of thought. A plot against the life of the Czar, and known to Zeneida! From whom could she have obtained the knowledge so quickly? From those two men; but from which?

Timidly approaching Zeneida, and leaning over her shoulder, she whispered—

"It was not the younger man of the two, was it, who told you?"

"No, no," replied Zeneida, to whom the child's whole soul was revealed. "Fear nothing for him! His hand and heart are clear from it."

"And you are in it?" asked the girl, touching Zeneida's breast with the tip of her finger.

Zeneida was startled by the direct question. Was it childish curiosity, or had it a deeper meaning? Bethsaba remarked her surprise.

"You see, there can be no secret where love is. I

will tell you all I know, and what hitherto I have told to no one—not even to my godmother, whom I believe I fear more than I love. But you I love so very, very much, and that is why I am going to tell what I know, and how terribly they plot against him. He himself told Sophie. In Petrowsko, the rebellious soldiers and peasants would not allow him to go further; they insulted and threatened him to that degree, that he had to turn back. Now these people were ragged and starving, and I can understand their being angry with him. But what complaint have you against him? You are rich, beautiful, and feted. Why, then, are you one of the ~~co~~spirators?"

An idea flashed into Zeneida's mind. This child might form the link in the chain that was still wanting.

"Come nearer; let us whisper it, that even the walls do not hear. I, too, love you, and will frankly tell you all I know. I, too, am in the conspiracy, and play an important part in it."

"What reason have you?"

"I am a 'Kalevaine'."

"And what is a 'Kalevaine'?"

"In Soumalain language, that which you are in the Circassian language. A girl who, when she came into the world had a home she no longer has, whose nation then Soumalain, is now known as Finnish. Doubtless you remember as clearly as I do the people and places you were amongst up to your sixth year; whom you may never look on again, and yet whom you never can forget?"

"Oh, it is true."

"Is it not? Amid all the pomp and splendour the world can give, in the midst of the most brilliant court festivities, do you not feel a sudden pang at heart when the thought of your dark native woods flashes across you; of the horsemen, on their fiery steeds, coursing over the rushing mountain streams; of the blue mountains in the far distance, and your ancestral castle, in which, enthroned, your father received the homage of his vassals?"

"Oh yes, yes."

"And even now you remember the legends told you by the murmuring streams of your native land?"

"You are right; you are right."

"Well, then, you see, so it is with me. My recollections, like the roll of the Imatras, are for ever surging in my soul. Just as little can I forget those moss-covered rocks, the most ancient peak in the whole world, the Fata Morgana of our Finnish plains; the red-roofed houses, with low beams across the rooms, from which hung strings of loaves; the legends of Kalevala, and its people's freedom, of which my father used so often to tell me. Then I did not understand all he said; now I recall all and—understand him."

"I, too, recall; but I do not understand yet."

"The Czar has deprived you and me of our fatherland; he has deprived our people of their freedom! And as through him we became orphaned, homeless, so he became a father to us in place of our own fathers. For our little kingdoms he has given us a great one; for our quiet homes, pomp and splendour. As a man, he has been a father to us; as Czar, a tyrant. For the one I cannot be ungrateful to him; for the other I cannot forgive him. So I stand hemmed in by two conflicting duties. As my adopted father, it is my duty to shield his sensitive heart, to protect him from the assassin's dagger, from pain and sickness; but at the same time I am bound to deliver my country from the iron grasp of the tyrant; to snatch from it its people and its freedom. Do you understand?"

"I see you fly before me; but I cannot follow your flight, cannot catch you up. Tell me, is 'he' too in the conspiracy?"

Zeneida knew whom she meant by "he."

"No. He dare not! I will not suffer him to take part in it."

"Oh, then permit me, too, to remain out of it. Had you told me he was in it, I must, too, have been."

"That's right! You shall keep each other out of it. But, all the same, you must stand by me in one part of the hard duty."

"Tell me what I must do! I will obey implicitly."

"Our first thought must be to bring Sophie here, and, to acquaint him whose heart is heavy on her account, that he need be anxious no longer."

"Will you allow me to be the first to go in to Sophie?"

"You, alone; she would not trust any one else."

And Bethsaba could not have desired greater happiness than to be the one privileged to step from the boat on to the balcony of the mysterious house in Petrowsky Garden. The flood had already risen to the balcony; and she it was who might hasten in to the neglected girl and say, "You are saved!"

The poor child was already without provisions or fuel of any description; for everything in the inundated cellar and dining-room was spoiled by water. Wrapped in her furs, she sat at the window, breathing upon it to make a clear space, and gazing with dismay at the huge blocks of ice floating unimpeded over the wrecked fence. Some, with their sharp edges, cut through the great trees opposing them as with a saw, others were tossed lengthways against their barks, those following hurled upon them, until suddenly a great silver birch would go down with a crash. Once the resistance formed by the trees swept down, the house must follow. A pencil and paper lay prepared upon her writing-table, a carrier-dove in its cage beside it; they had been brought her by the Czar, that she might let him know when danger was imminent.

She was waiting to send off her message until the extreme moment, for she knew the grave difficulties which surrounded his coming to her rescue.

Thus her joy may be imagined on seeing Bethsaba appear on the balcony.

Seizing her pencil, Sophie wrote with trembling fingers, "I am saved, and in good hands; have no

further anxiety for me!" then, tying her note on to the carrier-dove's wing, she set it loose. It flew up high in the air, disappearing in the direction of the Winter Palace.

Sophie did not ask where they were taking her, but followed Bethsabä in good faith.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### GOG AND MAGOG.

THE Czar had not undressed ~~at all~~ that night ; but, tired out, had thrown himself upon his couch, which had no covering but a bear's skin.

Before sunrise he was up, and, without making a change of dress, went to the window. It was frosted over ; he had to open it to see out. He quickly closed it again ; the sight was terrible ! In feverish excitement he threw on his cloak and hurried out. In the ante-room his physician, Sir James Wy'lie, was waiting, who at once accosted him with—

“Your Majesty may not go out to-day !”

“I may not ? Who commands me ?”

“I merely prescribe, Sire ; a right which physicians may exercise towards princes.”

“But there is nothing the matter with me.”

“But there may be. Your health is endangered.”

“That rests in the hands of God !” And he passed on. In the audience-chamber he found Araktseieff.

“Your Majesty *cannot* go out to-day !”

“So you, too, order me, as well as the physician.”

“Your Majesty's life is in danger.”

“Not for the first time. He who protected me yesterday, will not fail me to-day. Be a Christian, and do not treat me like a child who lets himself be frightened by old women's tales. Remain at your post ; I go to mine.”

Araktseieff knew the Czar, and that opposition

only made him more obstinate, so stood deferentially aside as the Czar strode past him.

The Czar passed, alone, down the long corridor hung with pictures of the battles he had fought. At the end of it a little negro groom stood waiting with a note which he handed in silence. It was the Czarina's page; a birthday present to her of long ago. The Czar hurriedly broke open the note and ran it over, then looked down meditatively. Without a word he went back to his apartment, and took off his cloak.

The note was from the Czarina: "I am afraid to be alone in the ~~place~~. Please do not leave me!"

The words were a command; one which even the Ruler of All the Russias had no choice but to obey. His wife was afraid! Therefore he is condemned to remain within the palace, like any imprisoned criminal.

For the first time for fourteen years his wife had made a request to him. How could he refuse it? Not only his sense of duty as emperor impelled him to repair to scenes of distress and danger, but also he was urged by that mysterious impulse within, which ever drove him from one end of his empire to the other, leaving him no rest by night, until he would rise, get into his carriage, and drive from street to street. To stay in one place was torture to him. He had but returned this very week from a journey which led him as far as to the Kirghis Steppes. And now was he to sit idly at home? His wife had asked it. It is not much she asks. She does not beg him to come to her in her apartments, to stay with her, to cheer and comfort her; she only asks him to remain under the same roof.

Now he has leisure to pace from one end to the other of his room, to hearken to the pealing of bells, the roar of the wind, and the splash of the waves, whose surf dashes up to his windows. Suddenly he utters a cry—"Where are you, Sophie?" It is well that no one hears him, that he is alone. In spirit,

he is in that solitary house, surrounded by the waves. His eyes search round the empty rooms where wind and weather sport unchecked, and not finding her, he cries, "Sophie! where are you?" The vision he had called up was even more terrible than the awful reality of raging nature without. He could better bear to look upon that. Rushing to the balcony of the palace, he tore open the glass doors, and gazed down upon the ghastly devastation. The sight was awful indeed!

Wide as an ocean bay, the giant river was rolling back its waves upon Lake Ladoga. Ever and anon from out the misty distance loomed visions reflected in the surface of the madly rushing waters.

When Napoleon, watching the fire of Moscow from the Kremlin, saw how the storm was rolling the sea of flame upon the city, he cried in despair, "But, what wind is this?" So now Alexander, as he watched the waves, driven by the furious storm, dash up against his palace, asked, "But, what wind is this?"

Houses roofless and in ruins; half-naked creatures clinging to their framework; here, a tiny hand raised in piteous appeal from its mother's arms; there, a man rowing with a plank, who finds no place to land on. Every gust of wind, every wave brings some fresh sight to view. Now comes the remnant of a menagerie; its cages, chained together, are being whirled about in eddying circles. A Bengal tiger, who has burst his bonds, dashes wildly from one cage to another. Some men, clinging to the bars, dare not climb to the top for fear of the infuriated animal. All must perish. Men and beasts shriek and roar in chorus. The waves dash them pitilessly on. Then comes the fragment of a wooden bridge wedged in between two icebergs. Upon it there still stands a carriage, shafts in air, from the interior of which projects a pink dress. Bridge and carriage float past, a flock of croaking ravens flying about them.

Who is sufficient for all these horrors?

The current swept on, swift as an arrow, the waves

playing with their icy barriers ; now building them into pyramids, now tearing them down, leaving a circling eddy to mark the spot.

Close by the Winter Palace stands the Admiralty, with its copper roof. The furious storm, tearing off a portion of this, rolls it up, with thunderous din, like a sheet of paper, flattens it out again, tosses it into the air, showering down fragments of it like a pack of cards ; then, finally, rips off the whole remainder of the roof, hurling it into the principal square. Then follows many thousand casks of flour, sugar, and spice, from the flooded warehouses of the Exchange—the while winter store of a great capital a prey to the waves !

Again another picture. Arrayed in order of battle, like a flotilla, come a series of black boats, not originally designed to carry their inmates over the water but under the earth. Coffins ! The flood had burst the walls of the military cemetery of Smolenskaja, washed up thousands of graves, and was now bringing back their occupants to the city, of which they had long ago taken farewell. The buried warriors were coming to march past the Czar once again—the hurricane, their deafening trumpets ; the waves, their kettledrums ! They even bring with them memorial chapel and marble crosses, which tower in ghostly fashion from out the icebergs !

Nor is the fearful cyclorama over yet. The horrors of it are ever increasing. In the distance looms a three-master—in the cold grey mist, it looks the ghost of a man-of-war. It had broken its moorings at Cronstadt in the gale, and now, driven before the wind, was bearing down upon the city at full speed !

At that moment the Czar, forgetful of his dignity, hid his face and wept—never thinking whether any eyes were upon him. And many eyes were upon him.

All those whom in the course of the previous night the Czar had rescued from the tottering houses in the suburbs—all those who, taken unawares in the

tumult of the fair, did not know where to turn, the Czar had lodged in the western division of the Winter Palace, giving up that brilliant suite of rooms to the use of the poor and destitute. Such tenants as these the Winter Palace had never harboured before! True, at New Year it was the custom for some forty thousand guests to assemble in the Winter Palace; but they swept the floors with silk, and illuminated the marble halls with their diamonds. Now, rags and tatters were in the ascendency. An exhibition of misery and destitution! There were collected together all those who form the ~~squad~~ brigade of a capital, and of whom the fashionable world have no conception—an aggregate of bitter want and of shameless depravity. They, who did not dare to creep forth by day from their dark cellars have given each other rendezvous in the Imperial Palace. The Czar sent them food and drink, and they have spent the night singing the "Knife Song" taught them by the frequenters of the Bear's Paw.

Czar Alexander heard it, and doubtless rejoiced to know his guests were in such good humour. They opened their windows, and those in front put their heads out, and called to the others to tell them what they saw.

The *façade* of the Winter Palace had two projecting wings. The refugees were housed in the west wing. Between that and the east, like the middle stroke of the capital letter E, stretched the covered balcony from which the Czar had watched the panorama of destruction.

On seeing him, his guests became mute.

He was an imposing figure, with expansive forehead bared to the fury of the storm. As long as he remained impassive, his self-control communicated itself to the spectators. But when they saw him break down and shed tears, when they saw that the Czar was but a man after all, they broke into sudden fury. Weakness aroused indignation.

A man, brother to the French republic, Marat,

seizing his opportunity, sprang upon the window-sill and shouted to the Czar—

“Yes, you may well cry! Cry for the loss of your fine city! The God of vengeance has sent this destruction upon us as a penalty for your sins! Plague, drought, starvation—all have come upon us through you! You were deaf to the cry of our suffering brothers, the Greeks! Their innocent blood cries to Heaven for vengeance! You are the cause of this devastation! Heaven is punishing us for what you have done!”

The noisy voices of the people within drowned the concluding words; their yells outvied the storm. The mutinous ~~spetek~~ had stirred up an almost frenzied excitement, and the refrain of the “Song of the Knife” resounded to an accompaniment of infuriated noise and confusion. They tried to burst open the strong doors communicating with the corridor leading to the Czar’s apartments.

He, standing on the balcony, was rooted to the spot by a double terror—behind him the yelling populace clamouring for his blood; before him the approaching ship. It was one of the largest men-of-war in the navy. During the winter frosts the crew had been paid off, and the few men left in charge had evidently escaped, so that it came along without guidance of any kind, and was, apparently, making direct for the Winter Palace.

At the sound of raised and fierce voices every window in the central portion of the palace opened suddenly, displaying a treble row of bayonets. At one of the windows stood Araktseieff, who shouted in his cruel, harsh voice to the rebels—

“Silence, instantly, you cubs of Gog and Magog, or I will have you cast back into the flood from which your sovereign lord saved you! Ungrateful savages that ~~ye~~ are!”

This was adding oil to the flames.

“Oh, oh, Araktseieff!” roared a thousand throats. “There’s the evil genius!”

"Come on!" screamed Marat. "Let's see if your thousand bayonets can conquer our ten thousand knives! Make a beginning, or we will!"

The ship came nearer and nearer.

As it reached within half a cable's length of the Winter Palace, the Czar perceived a man in the wheel-house turning the wheel.

"What are you about, man?" he shouted down angrily to him.

The man knew perfectly what he was about. It was Borbotuseff, a naval officer and a deserter. How came he on board? No one knew. He steered straight for the palace, with the ~~one~~ hope of crashing into it, in order that all within, and he himself, might be buried under it. A red flag was flying from the mast.

The struggling crowd, and the guards, saw nothing of all this; the balcony gallery cut off their view.

Now the moment had come to prove which was the stronger, the house of wood or the house of stone.

But the current was stronger than either, and instead of the bow of the ship striking the palace, it came broadside on. It drew so much water that its keel crashed on to the granite coping of the moat, throwing the vessel on its side; while, like a knight in a tournament with outstretched lance, it struck with its masts upon its stony adversary. A terrific shattering and grinding ensued—two of the masts broke to pieces against the pillars; the third crashed through one of the windows, shaking the whole massive structure from foundation to gable, yet the stone remained conqueror. The ponderous vessel broke in two; the bow half of the wreck was hurled on to Alexanderplatz; the afterpart, with the helmsman, fell back into the vortex, and was carried away with the current.

The concussion was like an earthquake. Of a sudden there was silence. People, soldiers, even Araktseieff, fell upon their knees. The man upon

the balcony alone remained standing. He had seen something in the air. It was a dove.

The dove flew direct to him, hovered for a moment, and then alighted on his shoulder.

It was Sophie's carrier-dove.

Alexander found the letter under its wing, telling him that Sophie was in good keeping. Then, folding his hands in a prayer of thanksgiving, he raised them to heaven.

But the dove is the sacred and wonder-working bird of Russia.

As it descended upon the shoulder of the Czar, the fury of the people changed to superstitious reverence. In it they saw the embodiment of the Holy Ghost. Even the most hardened was impressed. It was a divine miracle.

*Bozse czarja chrani!* An old mujik suddenly started the hymn of praise, and all present joined in it. Araktseieff's bayonets had become unnecessary. Marat's brother, leaving the rostrum, disappeared among the multitude. Who could have found him among the ten thousand there gathered?

The flood lasted two days longer, leaving behind it three thousand houses totally wrecked and a countless number of dead.

The people firmly believed that Heaven's judgment had been wrought because the Czar had not come to the assistance of the Greeks in their War of Independence.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### UNDER THE PALMS

WITHOUT, ten degrees of cold, raging storm, flood, devastation, misery, revolution, scenes of horror. Within, the palms knew nothing of all this. On the heights, under glazed roof, reigned perpetual spring, huge lamps, with ground-glass globes, replacing sunshine. And the tropical world suffered itself to be deceived. King-ferns, brought hither from the East, forgot that they were not growing in their native soil, and that they must remain for ever blossomless.

And in this artificial garden children were playing who had forgotten that their fathers and mothers were far away, perhaps not even caring. Here they neither got blows, nor were hungry; but danced round the "mulberry bush," and sang. Two beautiful young ladies—wards of the Queen of the Fairies—looked after them, just as in fairy tales.

Bethsaba had now a real true fairy tale to tell of her miraculous rescue from the terrible dangers; the sudden appearance of the handsome knight in her extremity, how his beautiful eyes, his look of daring, his heroic stature—

Sophie grew quite anxious to see him.

"You will soon see him; he is sure to come, he promised me he would. Still it does seem to be a long time before he keeps his word!"

"He is not, on any account, to know who I am,"

said Sophie. "It is to be kept secret here. Our hostess wishes it."

"Then we will only call you Sophie."

"It is singular that we three have only one Christian name; neither you, nor I, nor Zeneida bear our mothers' names in addition, as is usual amongst us. I cannot understand it."

"Nor I."

"Here he comes!"

"How do you know?"

"I know his footprint."

And, in truth, he came. Zeneida brought him in, more wet and muddy than the time before. His hair dishevelled; his face reddened by the cold wind. Withal, so handsome!

Bethsaba had told Sophie that here, too, a conspiracy was on foot; but that "he" was not in it. Who else, then? Sophie only believes what she sees.

"Come, come, Pushkin!" exclaimed Zeneida, with strangely radiant look. "Relate again, fully, what you have already told me."

And Pushkin recounted all that had happened at the Winter Palace, of which he had been an eyewitness, with the enthusiasm of a poet inspired by the catastrophe.

The second girl was a stranger to him. Had he known who she was, he would not have described, with such poetic warmth, the stirring scene when the Czar stood bareheaded, the storm raging round him, menaced alike by the fury of the people, and the fast approaching vessel.

She listened tremblingly to his recital, drinking in his every word with feverish anxiety, the varying expression of his face reflected in hers; her lips seeming mutely to repeat what he was saying! Shudderingly she hid her face when the ship collided with the palace! She felt the force of the shock, and staggered under it.

When Pushkin went on to tell about the dove—

her dove—how it descended on to the shoulders of her father, the Czar—with what joy the august ruler had raised his hands to heaven, and how with one voice the hymn of praise had burst forth from the lips of the rebellious people; the poor, overwrought girl's nerves could endure no more; with a cry of joy she threw herself into Bethsaba's arms, laughing and crying hysterically.

Pushkin, attributing her excitement to the power of his poetic delineation, was not a little proud of his success.

"But is all danger over now?" faltered Sophie, venturing to raise her tearful eyes to the young man's face.

He, not understanding the question, answered—

"The danger is not over yet, although the storm is certainly lessening, and once lulled, the Neva will return to its bed; but until then much damage may yet ensue."

"It was not that I meant; but if he is still in any danger—he, the Czar!"

Pushkin was amazed. What interest could this girl, Bethsaba's friend, feel in the Czar?

"Danger at the hand of man cannot assail him, for Araktseieff has taken the most stringent measures for his protection. All those who were given shelter in the Winter Palace are being transferred to the Admiralty. Nay; at such a time his very foes, even had he any, would be the first to protect him."

"How can that be?" she asked, and waited for Pushkin's answer with the devout attention with which, in former times, the answers of the Oracle were received.

A secret instinct told Pushkin that he must answer in all sincerity.

"Because the feeling of 'humanity' is stronger than that of 'love of freedom.' It protects alike the serf, when persecuted by the Czar, and the Czar when persecuted by the serf!"

The two girls heaved a deep sigh of relief into the air, weighted with these significant words.

"You are laying cruel waste in these two hearts," whispered Zeneida in Pushkin's ear. "You had better go back to your work."

"And you have not brought me the presents you promised?" asked Bethsaba, sorrowfully.

"I had not forgotten them; but from early morning we were busy trying to make fast the wreck; there must have been some one on board cutting through our ropes as fast as we threw them. And so I had no time to think of saving little children."

"When next you make a promise do not forget it," returned she, in tones of aggrieved reproach.

Pushkin could not understand her. Why that tone? How should he understand it? He promised to come again that evening to bring her good news, and something besides.

Neither she nor Zeneida had told him who the other girl was. Zeneida now took both girls into her boudoir. The time was approaching when she would be receiving many visitors, whom it was not expedient for them to see.

The catastrophe offered favourable opportunity to the "Szojusz Blagadenstoiga" to hold uninterrupted sittings. There was to be a meeting of the brotherhood of the "green book" to-day.

The two girls managed to find a "green book" for themselves. They searched about in Zeneida's boudoir until they found Pushkin's poem, "To the Gipsy." This, of course, they had not read before; for, according to the dictum of "good" society in Russia, a well-bred girl up to her fifteenth year may indeed see, but not read, romances. Moreover, that poem was not to be had in print, only manuscript. Alexander Pushkin had created quite a distinct calling, which had never existed before, that of transcriber. In every town were men who made a livelihood by copying out Pushkin's verses, sold, despite the Censor, by the booksellers. (There are

still many houses in which only written copies of the works of the Russian poet, Petösy, are to be found.)

The two girls now eagerly snatched at the forbidden fruit. First Bethsaba read it to Sophie; then Sophie to Bethsaba. The third time they read it together as a duet.

Then they conferred the name of its hero, "Aleko," upon the author. And when they wanted to speak of him called him only "Aleko." And it fitted—only the other way about. Aleko had wandered among the gipsies (gipsy, poet, or Bohemian being synonymous); this gipsy or poet had wandered among princesses. That evening Pierr Aleko came, bringing cheering news. The storm had subsided, and the water had fallen a span, although it must be some time before it resume<sup>u</sup> its proper level, for it stretched away eight versts on either bank.

("Oh, that it may last ever so long!" beat the heart of each maiden secretly.)

He had, moreover, brought something for Bethsaba—a little doll, such as he had promised her, but not a little muddy doll in rags, but a lovely, gaily dressed, sweet little doll, made of sugar. There were no others to be had; all the others had melted. Pushkin expected the girl to laugh at his offering; but she took the matter seriously, accepted it with greatest solemnity, placed it in her bosom, and it was evident that she was not sorry to see Sophie just a tiny bit jealous of her. Pushkin was not slow to see that he must be careful, so he sought in his pockets until he found something worth offering.

"See, fair Sophie"—he did not know her other name—"I have something for you too. You showed a special interest in the Czar this morning. Here is a piece of copper from the vessel that ran into the Winter Palace."

Thankfully it was received. The platinum mines of the Ural had never produced so precious a piece of ore.

"He can be no conspirator," whispered Sophie to Bethsaba.

"Decidedly not," whispered Bethsaba back.

"The storm has quite gone down," said Zeneida. "The bells have left off ringing. This will be a quieter night than those we have been having of late. Good night, Pushkin. If you do not hurry, you will find your boat running aground."

The girls would not have minded, if the water had not gone down so fast.

Zeneida despatched Pushkin home, and the girls to their beds. She was responsible for their good health.

But they were long before they could settle to sleep. There was so much to say about Aleko. They had made up quite a different ending to the poem than the real one; the gipsy girl was not to prove faithless, and even if she did, Aleko should despise her, and find a more faithful love. The gipsy girl must implore his pardon on her knees, be forgiven and not driven away from him. In a word, they made Aleko what they fain would have had him to be.

Zeneida, who slept in the next room, several times admonished them to go to sleep. Then they would be quiet as mice; the next moment to begin whispering again. At last her regular breathing proved Sophie, at least, to be slumbering. Bethsaba could not sleep; her heart beat so violently that, despite the prayers she said, midnight found her still awake. Suddenly it seemed to her as if the occupant of the next room had risen, and with light footsteps had gone out into the room beyond. The night was still. Neither sound of carriage-wheels nor patrol disturbed the quiet of the inundated streets. From a distant apartment rose a psalm, sung in a woman's voice, low and sorrowful—

"In every hour of grief and pain  
To Thee for help I crave,  
Oh, Thou to whom none cry in vain,  
Be present now to save."

Who was singing at that late hour? What grief could oppress her in this house? Betsaba drew the bed clothes over her head to quiet her trembling.

Three days longer the two girls spent under Zeneida's protecting care. That is, it was not until then that Princess Ghedimin ventured to return from Peterhof, or that the slime-covered ground-floor and cellars of the little dwelling in Petrowsky Gardens could be cleansed and thoroughly aired by old Helena. The girls meanwhile were living Elysian days. When Zeneida told them that they could now go to their homes, Betsaba sighed—

"When I came here I thought I was coming to the infernal regions; now I feel as if I were being turned out of Paradise!"

They saw Pushkin daily; had talks with him, and delighted in the great, noble soul which lay like an open book before them. Even earthly joys have their revelations, awaking super-earthly joy when they cease to be felt in secret. When the girls were alone, Aleko was the sole subject of their talk. Betsaba thought she must love Sophie the more for holding Aleko in such high esteem; yet she had not, even yet, breathed a word to her friend of her love for him. At first, she had thought, it would be an easy thing to tell. But the secret of a first love is refractory; it will not come forth from its concealment. She delayed her confession, guarding her secret like some hidden treasure; dissembled her love for him, or, at least, learned to belie her feelings that she might not betray the happiness that took possession of her at sight of him. Her blushes, she ascribed to headache, though, in reality, her head was innocent of any such discomfort.

But at the moment of parting the confession must be made. She would whisper it to her friend in few words, then run away.

When their sedan chairs actually arrived—no

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### PANACEA.

GREAT natural calamities often have a softening effect upon excited masses.

The "great power," the people, and the "little master," the emperor, made friends again in the general distress.

The storm of November, 1824, had been a universal calamity. History knows no other so wide-spreading in its devastating effects. Not only did it lay St. Petersburg in ruins; but it raged throughout Asia, and inundated the shores of California. Sailors saw the clear sea in mid-ocean thick with mud and slime; from India to Syria flourishing towns were laid in the dust by earthquakes; volcanoes burst forth in the Grecian Archipelago; in Germany many springs were dried up. The whole world was in a state of upheaval. It was no time to think of revolutions.

Political secret societies changed themselves into philanthropic unions. Party spirit died out. The poor went unhesitatingly to claim relief from the rich, and the doors of the rich were ungrudgingly open to them. The incitements of the "Irreconcileables" found no fruitful ground. Prince Ghedimin and Araktseieff vied with each other in their efforts to relieve the distress of the people. Each impartially scattered his hundred thousand of roubles abroad; the one forgetting that his aim had been to free, the other to oppress. The people now were in need of neither sword nor chains—only of bread.

Nor were the ladies of St. Petersburg backward

in relieving the distress caused by the inundations. Princess Ghedimin presented her diamonds to the committee, the sale of which brought them in thirty thousand roubles; while Zeneida gave a concert at the Exchange for the sufferers, the tickets for which sold for enormous prices, and which realized forty thousand roubles. Prince Ghedimin presented his wife with diamonds double the value of those she had given away. Zeneida received a wreath of laurel from the *jeunesse dorée* of St. Petersburg; and an ode from Pushkin. Thus once more had Korynthia lost the game; and her adversary had triumphed.

Those days of tribulation had made the Czar more reserved than ever. His melancholy had dated from the day on which he had witnessed the burning of Moscow, his capital; and now it had been his fate to witness the ruin of his second capital. One had been destroyed by fire, the other by water. Waking and sleeping the dread visions were before him.

But the saddest sight to him of all was that pale child's face, to which nothing brought animation. One day he said to Sir James Wylie—

“It is vain to try and cure me; my sickness lies within, not without. Cure Sophie; and I shall be cured.”

The physician was silent.

“Tell me frankly. Have you no hope?”

“None.”

“Has your medical skill absolutely no panacea, no remedy to preserve a precious life to us? No remedy which day by day might arrest Death hovering on the threshold, and so prolong that life from spring to autumn?”

“Yes, there is such a remedy, Sire! But it does not grow among health-giving herbs of India. In illnesses such as these the spirits of the patient are the most important factor. Sorrow, grief, and care hasten the catastrophe; while cheerfulness, an equable temperament, joy, and hope delay it. The love of life renews life.”

"Humph! How am I to give her joy, hope, and love of life, when I have not got them myself?"

A day came which brought joy to the Czar.

His Governor in the Urals announced to him the discovery of new deposits of gold and platinum, with promise of abundant mining. He sent a specimen of the platinum that had been found. A truly valuable discovery!

At the same time arrived a report from the Governor of Jekaterinograd, notifying the discovery in the great desert of a species of beetle which fed on the exuberant knot-grass (polygonum) of those parts, a useless plant and one impossible to extirpate. The beetle in question, known in the learned tongue as *Coccus polonorum*, is identical with the cochineal, and affords the most beautiful purple and pink dye. He sent the Czar, as a sample, a piece of rose-coloured silk dyed with the purple of the native beetle.

This was a greater treasure even than gold and platinum. It thrives on a weed, gives no trouble, and will support the inhabitants of those inhospitable steppes.

But the third consignment was the most interesting. The Governor of the Amurs sent from Siberia a cask of wine, grown in the Amur country. This is a still greater treasure than gold or bread, for it implies a triumph! A triumph in the face of the whole world, which proclaims Siberia to be a frozen hell! See! this wine contradicts it! It is more sparkling than champagne, sweeter than Tokay. At least one must pretend that it is. Siberia can grow wine! Henceforth every Russian must drink it. Siberian wine must supplant foreign wines for the tables of the great, it must compete with Burgundy, the Rhine and the Hegyalji. To be exiled to Siberia will no longer count as a punishment; those in search of fruitful soil will settle there of their own free will. Siberia can grow wine! If any one doubts the future of that country who would argue with him now? One gives him a glass and fills it: "Try this; this is Siberian wine!"

The Czar was as happy as a child! He still had one joy left.

And he hurried off on the strength of it to the Petrowsky Garden house. He had the platinum, the silk, and the cask of wine brought after him, thinking that what gladdened him, must also gladden Sophie. The poor child was looking very pale; she was not allowed to go out at all in the winter; the cold air out-of-doors was rapid poison to her; the heated air within doors slow poison. A strange country, where the invalid cannot even love his home! He hates the sky which kills him, and the earth which keeps him bound. It is the survival of the fittest; if a man be strong enough to enjoy a winter in Russia, he thrives; if not, he dies.

In every Russian lady's drawing-room is a special corner fitted up, called the "Altana."

It is a space surrounded by a little railing grown with ivy, and containing a bower of southern plants and flowers which during the long nine months of winter thrive and blossom in the artificial light and warmth of lamps and stove, and make one forget the rigorous weather outside.

Alexander had had such a fragrant orange grove fitted up for Sophie, when the house had been put in order for her after the inundation. He had not been to see her since the court gardener had carried out his instructions; perhaps it had given her pleasure.

Alas! nothing gave her pleasure.

The Czar asked, "What is amiss with you, my darling?"

"An unspeakable sorrow."

To cheer her, he showed her the treasures he had brought with him, the ore, silk, and wine. But her face did not brighten; she did not smile. To his good news, she had but—"How nice! how fortunate! Oh, thank you!"—to say.

"Come tell me, what is amiss with you? There is something more than bodily illness, it is mental trouble. Tell me, what is grieving you! To whom

should you tell it, if not to me? Who shall place confidence in me, if you do not feel it?"

Then, throwing her arms round her father's neck, and drawing his head down to her, Sophie whispered very low—

"It is love!" Then, drawing back with abrupt movement, buried her face in her hands.

Astonished, the Czar asked, "But where can you have met any one to fall in love with?"

"The flood brought us together."

"And who is the man?"

"If you speak so angrily I shall not dare to tell you."

"It is not anger, but excitement, that made me speak so sharply. He whom you love is forgiven everything."

"Really? You do not forbid me to love somebody?"

"If only he is worthy of you. What is his rank?"

"An officer of the Body Guard."

"I will give him a regiment, and make him a prince, so that he may ask you in marriage."

"Let me kiss you for that! But do not give him anything, father. Let him remain as he is; I love him for what he is now, and want him always to remain the same. He is more than a prince; more than a general! Higher far than they—"

"Who is it, then?"

"Well, Aleko."

"What Aleko?"

"Oh! do you not know his name? Then stoop down, and I will whisper it in your ear."

The Czar drew her to his side.

"Would you like to be his wife?"

For all answer, the girl looked at him with eyes opened wide and radiant expression.

"Would you like to be his wife?"

"What else could I desire? Poor little foundling as I am, I should be happy indeed to have such a prospect. And we should be so happy together."

Aleko would not murder me for my faithlessness. But how can we let him know? So far, he has not had permission to come here."

"From this time forth he shall."

"But who can tell him?"

"I, myself. I will bring him to you."

"You are as good a father as in one of Bethsaba's fairy tales."

"I will see myself to all the preparations, will arrange your dowry, settle the day, and command the Patriarch of Solowetshk here to celebrate the marriage."

"Oh yes, in summer, when the roses are out. My bridal wreath shall be of real roses."

"I will have your wedding ornaments made from this nugget of platinum. And now, you really are as happy as I am, are you not?"

"Oh, happier!"

"And will you have this pink silk for your wedding dress?"

"You have just guessed my wish—that my wedding dress should be pink. White makes one look pale; and I am pale enough without that."

"This wine from the Amur we will drink at your wedding breakfast."

"And I, too, will taste it. We will drink to each other. 'As many drops in this goblet, so many years our love shall last!' Is not that the saying?"

"Then you shall take up your residence on his estate. How strange that I should have just given him back his confiscated property! He shall have his ancestral castle put in order for you to live in, and I will come and visit you constantly."

Sophie clapped her hands with delight, her pale cheeks aglow. Then suddenly the light in her eyes died away.

"But is all this only joking?"

"Joking? Do I ever joke with you?"

"That Aleko should pay court to me, that you should give me to him for wife, that the Patriarch

should marry us on a lovely day in the lovely month of roses. Is it not all a dream?"

Alexander, instead of answering, took her in his arms, and closed her mouth with kisses.

Yes, poor child, it is real. The only unreal part of it is that before those roses shall have blossomed, you will be—

Alexander commanded Pushkin to his presence that very day, and made short work of the matter.

"You have caused a young girl to fall in love with you. You must marry her. Her name is Sophie Narishkin. Wait upon me to-morrow evening at six o'clock. I will take you to her, that you may formally ask her hand. You will then visit her daily, and see that you endeavour to cause her no sorrow. Her life hangs on the slightest thread ; that thread is in your hands. Beware, that you are not the cause of her death."

Pushkin was in a very awkward situation.

The hand of the Czar's favourite daughter was offered him—to him, the conspirator, the Constitutional, the sworn enemy of the tyrannical Czar. He was to ask a girl in marriage who was in love with him, whom he pitied and admired, but did not love. That girl's existence hung on the hope of becoming his wife ; with the extinction of that hope the feeble spark of life within her would be extinguished. Merely to breathe "I do not love you," would suffice to kill her. And what made his position the more difficult was the circumstance that at Sophie's he would be constantly meeting that other girl whom he looked upon as his betrothed, Sophie's only friend, Bethsaba, to whom he had given his whole soul. Two hearts to be thus stricken and betrayed !

What bitter punishment for past frivolity brought back upon his own head ! But there was no turning back. We are in Russia, and when the Czar commands there is no option but to obey.

The next day Alexander himself took Pushkin to Sophie. The betrothal took place in his presence.

Pushkin was able to convince himself that the heart entrusted to him was a treasure far above the merits of any sublunary being. He learned that there can be an ideal bliss, infinitely more sublime than any earthly enjoyment, utterly without sensual passion, a magic of sympathy which is not dependent upon the power of possession ; that spiritual attraction is stronger even than love. It was to him as though one of those angelic souls already floating heavenwards were drawing him thitherwards.

A few weeks later, Sir James Wylie said to the Czar—

“ Princess Sophie’s health is improving visibly.”  
“ I have found the panacea ! ” was the reply.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE WEDDING PRESENT.

As Alexander had said, so it was. His health was in close sympathy with that of his daughter. With the return of colour to her cheeks, his spirits revived. Once more he busied himself with affairs of State. In his study were whole piles of unsigned papers from various departments, and of letters through the "St. Sophie" post-box. He set to work upon them, and the mountain of papers was soon hugely diminished. The Sophien-post was a singular institution of Alexander's. In Czarskoje-Zelo was an office where any one might give in letters to be delivered direct to the Czar. The official demanded ten roubles a letter, but asked no questions either as to the writer or its contents, whether of complaint, petition, accusation, calumnia of those in office, or favourable mention, or schemes for a new constitution of the empire. One hour later it was in the Czar's hands were he in St. Petersburg, or was sent after him if he were travelling.

The surest sign of his improvement in health and spirits was that he ceased to tear through the streets at night, and supped on the first holiday evening with the Czarina, having decided to communicate the happy tidings to her. Elisabeth was the first to hear it. The Patriarch himself had only been informed that on the 21st of June he was to be at the late Czar Peter's residence on Petrowsky Island, where he would find a young couple waiting to be married.

Meanwhile, every petition addressed to the Czar's clemency was being granted. Exiles were allowed to come home, political prisoners released from prison.

It was not in vain that Pushkin had sacrificed his love. His tenderness charmed back to Sophie's lips the smile of happiness which is so delusively like that of health. And that smile charmed a bright, cloudless sky over the whole empire. When he came, punctual to the minute, with his bouquets of flowers, and with some pretty compliment about the improved looks of the girl hurrying to meet him, would sit down beside her and begin telling her the news, Pushkin was making the happiness of an empire. Or did he ask about her last night's dreams, and tell their meaning; or play cards with her, letting her win and himself be laughed at; or read poems and romances to her; bring her the first hothouse fruit or delicate *bonbons*; watch her somewhat inartistic attempts at drawing and painting, oft stealing a kiss the while, and getting his hair pulled for it;—then a whole empire was in sunshine!

This even the unfortunates on the far-off Baikal Lake, who break stones in Bleiberg mines, experienced. For every kiss pressed on Sophie's brow the fetters on a pair of hands were loosed.

The Czar, who purposely came to her late, after Pushkin had gone, always found her luxuriating in bliss. Her talk would be all of Pushkin, and of all he had told her.

Sometimes they talked about politics. Sophie induced Pushkin to confess what was the exact object of the secret society she had heard about. And, like an engaged man should, Pushkin candidly told her that what they wanted was a parliamentary constitution; that among them there was many a man who could speak as well as the members of the English House of Commons, and who ought to have the right to be heard. The government would then find a majority composed of Tartars, Kirghis, Kalmucks, Jakutes, Bashkir, and Finnish deputies, who

would out-vote the Russian revolutionists, and the country would be tranquillized. That parliament should have the control of the exchequer, so that in the case of a minister peculating, he might be sent about his business, and, at least, give others the chance to do the same. Freedom of the press was also necessary, so that they might go to loggerheads among themselves instead of growling in an undertone. That was what they hoped to arrive at. The Czar was infinitely amused when he heard of it all, taking it very differently from what he did when Araktseieff told him the same things.

People began to think that the good times were coming back. Some ten years ago they had ventured to talk of constitutional liberty in presence of the Czar, and the meetings of free masonic lodges were openly announced in the daily papers.

The improvement in Sophie's health deceived even the doctors ; the bad symptoms had entirely disappeared. Miracles do happen sometimes ! The power of nature is inexhaustible ! Preparations for the wedding began in earnest. The Czar had the bride's trousseau, including the pink silk gown and platinum diadem, sent from Paris ; and had the satisfaction of revelling in Sophie's radiant face on seeing all the lovely things.

One day the Czar said to Pushkin—

“ My son, if God permits us to live to that happy day, which will also be a turning-point in my life, what shall I give you for a wedding present ? ”

And Pushkin, falling on his knees, said—

“ Father, on that day give your subjects a constitution.”

The Czar was silent. This gave Pushkin courage to continue.

“ Your Majesty, the whole world is in a state of ferment, and preparing for eruption, like Vesuvius. The volcanic eruption can be avoided by a roll of paper inscribed with the single word ‘ Charter ! ’ Not I alone, but your whole country, every honest man,

every patriot, every one about the throne, thinks and says the same. Do not grant us immediate freedom, do not remodel our country on foreign lines; but lead your people gradually step by step towards freedom; suffer the constitution to be shaped according to their habits and needs. Do away with serfdom! Banish Araktseiff, who stands like an evil genius between you and your subjects. Take the education of the masses out of the hands of the Sacred Synod, and restore it to Galitzin. Call the notables of the land to your throne-room, and command them to speak out candidly to you. Do away with the censorship, and grant permission to every man to publish his thoughts to the light of day; dismiss the dishonest stewards who are robbing you and the country. Annul the military colonies, which are a very pest of oppression in the land; summon the old regiments, give them back their standards, unite them in a camp, put us at their head, and send us to the rescue of our Greek brothers in arms, who are drowning in a sea of their own blood. You will see what a nation is capable of when, in possession of freedom herself, she is fighting for the independence of other nations—how she would rise above all others! Oh, give us freedom, and we will give you glory!"

The Czar listened to the end, then said—

"Rise! I forgive you your audacious words!"

Some day later Araktseiff set off, very quietly, for his country estate, Gruschino. It was whispered that, at his own request, he had been granted a long leave of absence. His departure was emphasized the more by Prince Ghedimin being chosen as his successor. He now was among the confidential *entourage* of the Czar, who might approach him, at any hour, without being announced.

More still took place. Magnitzky, the most detested member of the Council of Enlightenment, was

dismissed ; and younger censors were appointed instead of the old ones. It was also known that the Russian Ambassador at the Porte had received instructions to energetically promote a more humane system of warfare against the Greeks in their War of Independence. It was also decided to form a camp instantly in the vicinity of Bender.

Finally—clear sign of a new epoch—all the regiments of the Guards were recalled from the military colonies and concentrated in St. Petersburg.

These events filled the apostles of freedom with new hopes. The *Secret Society of the North* decided, on these lines, to support the Czar by all means in their power, although the leaders of that society were not misled. Pestel sent word to Ghedimin : " It is all a comedy ! They want to make fools of us ; the whole business will only last three months. I shall stick to my plan ! " But the " Bear's Paw " by degrees lost all its associates ; and the sole use Jakuskin found for his knife at that time was to pick his teeth with.

Pushkin, meanwhile, devoted himself completely to his duties as bridegroom, and to versifying. He wrote a charming poem under the title of " The Spring of Baktshisseraj," which he read aloud first to Sophie. And the milder censorship made its publication easy.

When the Czar was informed that the poem had been submitted to the Censor—of course, such an event had to be notified to the Czar—he said to Pushkin—

" I advise you to dedicate your poem to a certain lady."

" To my betrothed ? "

" No. To the Princess Ghedimin."

Pushkin understood the hint. It was desirable in some manner to pay court to Sophie's mother. This was the most natural way.

The Czar added—

" When you take her your poem, tell her that on

the 21st of June you will celebrate your marriage with Sophie Narishkin."

That, too, was quite *en règle*. Pushkin needed no explanation. The bridegroom-elect must himself take Korynthia the tidings of Sophie Narishkin's approaching marriage, and receive from her the kiss of consent. The wooing and consent would be expressed in the form of the dedication of the poem, and its acceptance. The form was delicate yet expressive. Both think differently and speak differently: it was a wooing under poetical guise.

Pushkin was quite up to the proprieties in first seeking out Prince Ghedimin.

"Ivan Maximovitch, I have written a new poem, which I should greatly like to dedicate to the Princess Maria Alexievna Korynthia. May I beg you to read it, and if you deem it worthy of the honour of bearing the Princess's name to be my advocate with her?"

"I will read your verses with pleasure, and may venture to tell you beforehand that the Princess will esteem your dedication as a great distinction; and will be proud to read her name in print on any work of yours."

And Pushkin, that same day, received a note from the Prince telling him that the Princess would receive him the next day at seven o'clock in her summer palace on Neva Island.

The great heat prevented people going out earlier. The St. Petersburg world of fashion had already repaired to their villas. Even the rich burgher lived in Neva Island on his "dotcha." The Czar had accompanied Elisabeth and her court to her favourite castle of "Monplaisir," in the vicinity of which was Sophie's dwelling.

The Czar could now visit her very seldom, for in June the nights are not dark in St. Petersburg. But she had her lover to keep watch over her.

But one short week separated them from the wedding.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### MADAME POTIPHAR.

AT the appointed hour Pushkin presented himself at Villa Ghedimin ; and was passed on from one footman to another, until he finally arrived at Korynthia's boudoir.

The Princess was a handsome woman ; but to-day she wanted to surpass herself. The feminine fashions of that day were very becoming. The pale golden silk, fine as any from the loom, thrown lightly about her head, enhanced the gold of her waving hair arranged in a classic coil, and threw up her complexion ; as did the soft Brussels lace the whiteness of her neck and arms. Her shoulder-straps even were set with yellow diamonds, and, coquettishly placed between the lace, was a pale yellow tea-rose. Her whole being betrayed an agitation, unusual to her. She blushed and smiled as Pushkin entered. And both blushes and smiles repeated themselves during the greeting and exchange of customary courtesies. Then she signed him to a chair, whilst she seated herself upon a silken divan opposite to him and opened the conversation.

"I have shed as many tears over your lovely poem, as though I had been myself to the Baktshisseraj Well of Tears."

"I am rejoiced that the heroine of my lay should have won your sympathy, Princess. For in her I impersonated my betrothed, Sophie Narishkin."

What a change passed over her face !

Her cheeks aflame with anger, her eyebrows arched like bows, her eyes shooting out arrows of fire.

" You desire to marry Sophie Narishkin ? " she cried passionately. " Impossible ! "

" I think it, on the contrary, very possible ; seeing that our wedding is already fixed for the 21st of June."

" In a week ? Has the betrothal been already announced, then ? "

" No ! A dispensation has been granted ~~for~~ our marriage."

Springing from her divan the Princess gasped—

" Impossible ! Impossible ! "

Pushkin retained his seat. He was not easily frightened by any man—or woman either. So he answered calmly—

" But, my dear Princess, what objection can you have to it ? "

Korynthia saw that she had suffered her impetuosity to carry her too far. So, commanding herself, she resumed her seat, and made as if fanning herself from the heat.

" He who advised you to this was no friend of yours ! " she hissed out.

" It was the Czar ! "

Korynthia, shutting her fan, put it to her lips. After a short silence, she said—

" You know, then, that the Czar is Sophie's father ? "

" I have divined it."

" And have you also divined the future which awaits you in marrying a daughter of the Czar ? You will be banished from the society in which you have hitherto lived ; the circles into which you will try to force yourself will hold you in contempt. As long as the Czar lives, you will be a prisoner in the glittering cage of the court ; deprived of free will ; an unhappy man born to enlighten others, condemned to be the shadow of a man ! At the death of the

Czar you may be appointed to a governorship in the Caucasus, or on the Amur."

"Princess! I shall neither become a prisoner at court, or governor of Kamschatka. My wife will accompany me to my little estate of Pleskow, where I mean to be sometime farmer, sometime poet."

"You do not love the girl. Vanity alone has led you to this step."

Pushkin never took a blow unrequited—even from woman.

~~Princess~~, did you know her, you would know that it were impossible not to love her!"

The Princess bit her lips until they bled. It was a cruel thrust. Quickly upon it followed a second.

"Sophie has only inherited her father's sweetness of disposition; nothing of her mother."

The Princess rose. She could bear it no longer. Her face was deathly pale; her eyes gleaming with a dangerous light. Going up to Pushkin, she seized his hand, as she whispered—

"Has the Czar also confided to you the name of Sophie's mother?"

"Never!"

"Have you heard it from any one else?"

"From no one who had a right to know it."

"Come, then, sit down by me," gasped the Princess, convulsively clutching Pushkin's arm, and drawing him on to the divan beside her. "Listen to me! I will make a confession to you. What I have hitherto told to none but the Patriarch, I will confess to you." Sobs choked her voice; then violently tearing the lace handkerchief with which she had dried her tears, she continued, "Even to my husband I have never dared to say what I now tell to you, 'I am Sophie Narishkin's mother . . .'"

Pushkin, of course, appeared to be intensely surprised at this discovery.

"You be my judge," continued the Princess, as she threw back the gossamer covering from her shoulders.

"I was but a child, scarce sixteen ; my parents dead. I met a man whom all conspired to worship. The aunt who brought me up was a vain, ambitious woman, and had made me equally so. Every one about me counselled me to return his love ; telling me that he was unhappy for cause of me. They sought out old records of how Czars who had not loved their wives had sent them into convents, and had raised others, more beloved, to share the imperial throne. Flattery, ambition, inexperience, youthful fancy, turned my head, and I—fell. Ah, how low I fell. So low—that my whole life since has been ~~one~~ expiation ! Still, I never relinquished hope ; I ever believed that the man who had wronged me would come one day to raise me from shame to splendour. I implored him ; I knelt in the dust at his feet. Then he published the ukase that only the daughters of reigning families might be raised to the throne of Russia—that was the answer to my dreams ! In the depths of my despair, a man in my own rank of life came and asked my hand. True, he had no love to give me, but he gave me his name ; I, too, had no love to give him, but I have borne his name honourably and spotlessly before the world. And now there suddenly breaks upon me the dreaded catastrophe which for sixteen long years has been my nightly terror : Sophie Narishkin will marry, and people will be asking, 'But who is this Sophie Narishkin—who was her father—who her mother ?'

"You may make yourself at ease on that score, Princess. The wedding will be conducted in all privacy by the Patriarch of Solowetshk in the Chapel of Peter the Great on Petrowsky Island. After the wedding not a soul will see the young couple in St. Petersburg, or speak about them."

This consolation was poison to the heart of the Princess. Would she see Pushkin no more, then ?

"But why this feverish haste ? The girl is but a child, scarce sixteen years old !"

"Princess," returned Pushkin, mournfully, "we

do not reckon time by years, but by the griefs we endure ; and by that computation Sophie has already lived a long life. Sixteen years of confinement, of banishment, unrecognized by any one—sixteen years without knowing a loving word, or ray of brightness, should count for age enough ! It is just this dream of happiness that is keeping the poor child in life. Sophie is a somnambulist on this earth. To awaken, would be to kill her ! ”

“ So—it is a spirit of magnanimous self-sacrifice which binds you to her—you are not in love with her ? ”

“ I worship her—am hers for ever.”

“ I see. Permit me to meditate over the subject. This news has taken me so by surprise, that I can give you no answer at present. Can this marriage not be delayed ? ”

“ No.”

“ Why not ? ”

“ The Czar is going on a journey—it may be a long—very long journey. He will shortly hold a great review of the Guards, and then start. But of this, Prince Ghedimin can inform you better than I. At any rate, it is the Czar’s pleasure that our marriage takes place before he leaves.

“ Then, at least, allow me to defer my answer to the last moment. I have so much to say to you ; do give me as long a time as you can. Come again on the twentieth, and even then not until dusk, so that your coming may not attract attention. In order to enter unperceived—you will readily understand why I should not wish a visit from Sophie’s bridegroom, on the very eve of his wedding-day, to be publicly known—take this key. It belongs to the door of the verandah, which opens on to the park. Thence, by a spiral staircase, you ascend direct to my apartments. We can then talk over various matters undisturbed, which you ought to know.”

Pushkin put the key entrusted to him in his pocket, and kissing the Princess’s hand, took leave. Korynthia

giving him the farewell kiss on his lips, and accompanying him to the door of her room.

From this we glean that the Russian scientist was right in his remarks upon "degenerated cats," at least as far as this woman is concerned.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### A MOTHER'S BLESSING.

IN the villa shaded by aromatic pines the bride-elect awaited the happy day. No longer a prisoner, condemned to lifelong imprisonment. For the hardest imprisonment of all is sickness ; one is made to hear at every step, "Oh, don't run. Don't sing. You must not drink water. Keep your shawl about your throat. Do not eat this ! Mind you don't take cold. Don't get overheated ! "

Even the doctor stays away. The panacea has done wonders.

The lovely month of roses had come. The bride-groom had had the path along which Sophie was to walk, planted with roses ; and the happy girl collected the blossoms, morning and evening, that not a single leaf might fall to the ground. Why did she do this ? When the leaves were dry, she meant to fill a silken cushion with them ; sleep would be so sweet on such a cushion.

She was even now spreading out her leaves on the sunny side of the verandah, singing to herself as she did so. No one forbade her to sing now, it was allowed ; only old Helenka grumbled out the adage, "Sing on Friday, cry on Sunday." But Sophie is accustomed to laugh at such wise saws from her old nurse. Who believes in such superstitious omens nowadays ? When all of a sudden good old Helenka sighed out anxiously—

"Holy Maria ! St. Anna ! What brings her here ? "

And without another word, she ran off to avoid the new-comer.

Sophie, looking up wonderingly, saw a lady of striking beauty coming down the garden path. She wore a dress of gay-coloured embroidery, a bird of paradise in her bonnet, and upon her shoulders was a costly cashmere shawl. At sight of the stranger's seductive beauty Sophie felt a mysterious shudder pass through her frame; her heart seemed to stop beating. She began to believe again in omens.

The stranger came alone, and at an hour too early for ladies, as a rule, to be out. Without hesitation she ascended the verandah steps, like one who knew the house well.

As she reached Sophie, she raised her hand with the gesture of one expecting to have it kissed; saying in a low voice, as she did so—

“I am Princess Ghedimin!”

The girl's heart beat audibly; but she had no alternative, she must kiss the gloved hand.

“You have never seen me before?” the lady asked.

Sophie shook her head in silent negation.

“Let us go together into your sitting-room, then. Is there any one with you?”

“No one.”

The lady went on first, and having reached the room, took off her bonnet. Her abundant fair hair was dressed high, *à la giraffe*.

“Now kiss me, child. I am your mother!”

Sophie did as she was bid.

The Princess looked about her. Embroideries, pretty dresses, the whole trousseau lay scattered about in charming disorder.

“Ah! Your trousseau. So you are going to be married, little one? Did it never strike you that so serious a step demanded a mother's blessing upon it?”

The girl ventured to reply, “I had been told that I was neither to visit, nor to write, to my mother.”

"But you might have let me know through your little friend Bethsaba, who has been seeing you daily."

"I thought she would have told you."

"No; not a word. Oh, girls nowadays can keep their own counsel! Not once did she mention 'his' name to me; it was by mere chance that I heard it. Herr Pushkin came to me yesterday, to ask my permission to dedicate his new poem, 'The Springs of Baktshisseraj,' to me."

"To you?"

"Have you any objection to his doing so?"

"On the contrary; I am glad."

"And he happened casually to mention, that in a week he was about to lead Sophie Narishkin to the altar. I was astonished. I fancied you still playing with your dolls. Who brought this big doll to you?"

"My father."

"And do you think yourself sensible enough to marry yet?"

"I do not know if I am sensible; I only know that I love him!"

"A categorical answer! How positive you are that he will marry you! And where did you get to know Pushkin?"

"During the flood. Oh, I was in such terrible danger! Had they not come to save me, I should have been washed away."

"Who came to save you then?"

Sophie was surprised at the question.

"Do you not know? Did not Bethsaba tell you?"

"Bethsaba? No; she has not spoken to me a word of you or Pushkin. Sly girl—she shall pay for this. So the same fairy sheltered you who carried off Bethsaba from my carriage? That devil in woman's form! And Bethsaba has thought well to keep it from me! And for whole days and nights you were in that den of iniquity! Now I understand it all! It is this fiend who has brought it all about."

"Mother, do not curse her! I owe all my happiness to her."

"Do you know then what is 'happiness'?"

"To be loved."

"And do you know what is its opposite?"

"That I do not know yet."

"To be betrayed."

"Who would betray me?"

"Who but he, whom you believe loves you?"

"My Aleko?"

"Yes, your Aleko; who is the property of so many besides you. A more fickle man, a greater deceiver, more cruel, dishonourable, you could not have met with on earth."

"What reason could he have to deceive me?"

"Because he hopes, through you, to rise to higher rank."

"Oh no! He has refused all titles, rank, and possessions. He is taking me as I am. My trousseau and this piece of iron—a piece of the ship which ran into the Winter Palace, and which he gave me on the day of the catastrophe—are my whole wealth. He means to remain a poor man, and to make himself a name which no dukedom could rival."

"How he can deceive you! His schemes stop only at the throne. He is marrying you that in the next revolution he may figure as the Russian 'Prince Egalité.' Nay, more, as another Pugatscheff! Why, do you not know that he is one of the conspirators, whose aim is to oust the Czar from the throne?"

"But it was my father who brought him here."

"Because he has a honied tongue with which he can deceive the Czar—and lull the daughter to sleep."

"Oh, mother, you hate him sorely!"

"And with reason! Does not this marriage threaten to ruin my whole life; will it not bring the secret of your birth to light, that birth, the bane of my early years?"

"Mother! Do you curse the day of my birth?"

"Not now only, but twice daily. When I wake and when I lie down. You were as a death-sentence to me, the hour of which was unfixed. I have thought with shuddering of you. You have been my accomplice; a living witness to my wrecked honour—and now, my fate is to be accomplished through you. You announce to the whole world that you exist—look! here am I!"

"No, mother; I will hide myself. No one shall see me. No one shall know of me."

Korynthia here pretended that pity and maternal love had gained the mastery. In sorrowing tones, she exclaimed—

"But, my poor child, do you not know that you are condemning yourself to a living grave—that you are choosing a life worse than hell? You will be the wife of an adventurer, who is sunk so low in sin, so fettered by vicious associates, that even, if he desired it, he is powerless to avoid the consequences. Do you want to follow him to Siberia?"

"If misfortune assails him, I will share it with him."

"And suppose the mad scheme, in which he is the foremost actor, succeeds, and his hands are stained with your father's blood?"

"Then I will find a path in which to implore Heaven's pardon for him."

"Blinded creature! Your self-created ideal prevents your seeing the man as he is. Do you believe it possible to confine a heart in a cage that is accustomed to take free flight, and which, moreover, you have by no means made captive? For Pushkin loves you not! I tell you, he loves you not! Be convinced; he loves you not!"

Sophie looked in bewilderment at Korynthia. The instinct of her woman's heart, added to a nervous foreboding, told her the horrible truth. Seizing Korynthia's hand, she exclaimed—

"*You love him!*"

"*You are right!*" hissed Korynthia, with wild vehemence.

Sophie, pressing her hands to her heart, turned white as death ; her eyes closed, her breathing stopped, and she fell lifeless to the ground.

The Princess went in search of Helenka.

"Go in to your mistress ; she is not well."

And drawing her cashmere closer about her (the mornings are misty by the river), and replacing her bonnet, she left the villa.

Knowing that her farewell kiss would be of no benefit to the poor swooning girl, she let it alone.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE WILL.

THAT day Pushkin felt as heavy-hearted as if he had not only all the sins of the world, but the national debts of all Europe upon his shoulders. Was it one of those presentiments to which the race of poets, whose stock-in-trade is nerves, are so sensitive? Nothing gave him any pleasure. He went to Zeneida, to formally announce his approaching marriage to her. She had long been informed of it, for she possessed a splendid service of secret police.

Zeneida replied, with cold, stoical irony—

“I still do not believe that the Czar’s daughter *will marry you.*”

“Probably not; for *I* intend to marry the Czar’s daughter!”

“Is Princess Ghedimin informed of it?”

“I have announced it to her.”

“Then nothing will come of it.”

“It has nothing in the world to do with her.”

“I prophesy it. Else why am I the pythoness? Does Prince Ghedimin know of it?”

“Prince Ghedimin? *Mille tonnerres!* Am I to go to the Prince, too, to ask for Sophie’s hand? He, at any rate, is out of it.”

“Not on account of your wooing, my friend, but that the Prince may erase your name from the ‘green book.’ You will doubtless see that the name of the son-in-law of the Czar can hardly adorn—I will not say blacken—its pages.”

"By Jove! you are right. I had not thought of that."

With heavier heart than he had come, Pushkin left her.

Zeneida's villa was on the Kreskowsky Island; thus some distance from Sophie's home, which lay embowered in orange groves. From afar the light-green roof was visible, standing out amidst the pines. Every evening a white flag was to be seen floating from the flag-staff, hoisted by Sophie herself, as a signal that she was expecting him. Sometimes she would come down to the shore to meet him, her white-clad figure greeting him when he was yet a long way off.

Now, neither white flag nor white-clad maiden was visible. He hastened on impatiently. Usually, as his boat approached the landing-stage, another, in which sat Bethsaba, would row away. The Circassian Princess never awaited Pushkin; they only exchanged greetings from a distance. Now he perceived a gondola painted in the Ghedimin family colours, still chained to the landing-stage; the boatmen stretched on benches fast asleep.

Without waiting for his boat to reach the land, Pushkin sprang ashore, and ran towards the house.

On either side of the path Sophie's beloved roses were blooming; the ground was covered with their fallen leaves.

"What can have happened," thought Pushkin, "that your guardian angel has not been gathering up your leaves this evening?"

"Go indoors; you will soon know the reason," answered the roses.

He found no one upon the verandah. He opened the familiar tapestried door leading into Sophie's private apartments. There he learned why the rose leaves had not been gathered in that day.

Sophie lay upon her bed, white as death. Yesterday's soft bloom had all fled from her cheeks; they were almost transparent. The anguish she had

undergone had left a transfigured expression upon her face. She was clasping Bethsaba's hand, who sat by her bedside, their fingers interlaced in prayer.

Pushkin advanced cautiously, concealing his alarm. It is not well to let invalids see that their appearance inspires anxiety.

"What is this? Are you not well?"

"No, Aleko; I am dying. Do not be startled; it is past now. I have wrestled through it. You, too, will live through it."

"Oh, do not speak so, my love!" stammered Pushkin, kneeling by the bed, and covering the girl's white face with kisses. "It is but some slight feeling of illness that will pass off, as so often before. I will go and fetch the doctor."

"You will go nowhere! You will stay, when I tell you to. Do not oblige me to talk loudly, but obey. Think, were you to go and alarm Wylie with the news that I am on my death-bed, he would at once inform the Czar. The Czar just now is engaged upon a great work for the good of the country; he is arming for war. Millions depend upon his decisions for freedom, and a happier future in store. For this he needs all his powers. My father loves me so dearly, and depends so entirely upon me, that the news of this illness will completely unman him, and render him unable to carry on the work he has in hand; the thought of his dying daughter would deprive him of all energy and power. Is it not strange? In my lifetime scarce a dozen people have known of my existence; in my death shall millions upon millions curse the day of my birth and my death! So, I implore you, do not disquiet the Czar with the news of my extremity."

With passionate vehemence Pushkin answered—

"What matters to me Hellas and the Russian Constitution—now that you are ill? I must save you!"

The reason which led Pushkin to this embittered exclamation was characteristic of the times. Else-

where, and at any other era, a lover, under similar circumstances, would have said, "Very well; I will not go to the Czar's physician, but to the first skilful doctor whom we can trust not to publish your illness, and he shall cure you." But at that period no one thought of going to a Russian doctor who did not want to hasten his death. Rather would they go to a quack, or trust to household remedies, than confide themselves to a St. Petersburg doctor. It was the surest way to court death. People only sent to apothecaries for rat-powder; indeed, under Czar Alexander, Russian subjects were forbidden to be apothecaries; Germans only were allowed. A Russian mistrusted his countryman; he held him capable of giving a sick man—in the interest of his enemies—poison, instead of remedies. The aristocracy would only be attended by the Czar's and Czarina's physicians. In their absence, it was no use for any one to be ill.

"I have begged you not to excite me! In vain would you bring me all the Galens in the world, with their potions; I would take none of them. I will drink no more of that odious physic that tastes of bitter almonds. I must die! Do you understand? I *must*. My death is necessary, irremediable. Not because I am ill, but because I am condemned to die. And it is right that it should be so!"

Pushkin, unable to solve this riddle, looked inquiringly at Bethsaba, who, at this, made a movement to go. But Sophie held her back.

"Stay! I want you both. Pushkin, be a man—a brave, strong man! Are you a child, that you are trembling so? Grant me what I ask. I am going to make my will. Draw the writing-table up to my bed, light two candles, and place the crucifix between them; but first shut the shutters, and make it night! Oh, these terrible summer nights in St. Petersburg, with their endless gathering dusk—it seems as if night would never come, and day would never cease! It is such an oppression! Ah, I feel calmer now that

it is dark. Now come and sit down by me and write ; or would you rather lay the portfolio on my bed, and write kneeling ? So you shall, then. And you, Bethsaba, kneel beside him. Attend to what I say, and write : ' Surrendering my soul to God, my ashes to earth, I, Sophie Narishkin, bequeath, on my death, all my worldly goods to my only friend the Circassian Princess, Bethsaba Dilarianoff. The only two things I desire to have buried with me are the little piece of lead which I have ever worn upon my heart ; and, under my head, the little green silk cushion filled with rose-leaves, on which I shall rest peacefully.' What, cannot you see the letters that you are writing all across the paper ? Pushkin, what a baby you are ! Write further : ' To my one and only friend I bequeath the greatest treasure I have in the world—my Aleko Pushkin ! ' "

At these words Bethsaba would have started up, but Sophie would not allow it. Twining one arm round her neck, the other round Pushkin's, she pressed their cheeks together.

" Am I not to be allowed to dispose of my treasure as I like in my will ? Do you think, then, that I do not know how dearly you love him ? Before I confessed to you my love for him, his praises were for ever in your mouth ; since then you have never once mentioned his name. Do you think I did not know why you always hurried away when he came ? Your cheeks used to be so rosy, and you so merry and full of fun. Now they are white, and you are so sad and lifeless. Do you think I have not divined your grief ? You love him, as I do. Do not conceal it any longer. Tell the truth. Do not have any secrets longer from a dying girl, who to-morrow will be a spirit, knowing all that is in your spirit. Do not wait for my disembodied soul to come nightly to disquiet you, asking, as a spectre, the answer to the question you refused me in life. Confess that you love Aleko ! "

As she heard these words Bethsaba's heart felt

nigh to bursting, and with open lips and upturned eyes she fell unconscious to the ground.

"Lift her up and lay her by me on the bed," said Sophie, tranquilly. "Now you have two dead brides to choose between. Only one will wake to life again, for she has not been killed. You can have no doubt now but that she loves you. Leave her unconscious. It is better that she does not hear what I have to say. But you, keep every word in your heart of hearts, and do as I bid you, for you know that girls who die during their betrothal change into spirits whom it is not good to anger. So, listen. You are not to leave Bethsaba's side again. I know why I say this. If you let her go home, she will never look on God's free heaven again; she will be confined for life in St. Katherine's Convent."

Now Pushkin began to divine what had happened.

At the mention of St. Katherine's Convent in Moscow, there flashed across him all the scandalous adventures he had heard the officers of the guards boast of at their mess dinners, out-doing even the scandals of Paris. The convent had a reputation only equalled by the very worst convents of Montmartre. Young lieutenants wore the rosaries of the nuns of St. Katherine's as bracelets, and only that year a terrible case had happened which had been hushed up by the authorities. The last descendant of a noble family had disappeared suddenly from society in Moscow, and after a month of vain searching, his body was discovered cut to pieces in one of the convent wells. And thither her godmother intends to send Bethsaba, where not only her happiness for this world but the next is to be imperilled. And Princess Ghedimin was thoroughly capable of it.

"So, no indecision, no sentiment," continued Sophie.

"On the day of my death you must marry Bethsaba; if not, she is lost." True, the world will say, 'The scoundrel! the very day he closed the coffin

on his betrothed, he could open his heart to another.' But you will be in possession of my will, dictated to you by me, and signed with my shaking hand ; lay it upon your heart, and it will give you peace. And if your conscience acquits you, what matters the judgment of the world ? Be daring ! The Patriarch of Solowetshk will be waiting in the Czar Peter's castle on Petrowsky Island. He is charged to marry a young girl to an officer in the Guards without previous publication of banns. He does not know them, or their names. Two witnesses will be necessary ; I have provided for that. Zeneida can be one, Helena's husband, old Ihnasko, the other ; both are trusty friends. And while the one gondola, to the voices of the chanting choristers, glides gently along with my flower-bedecked coffin to the lovely willow-shaded vault on this bank of the Neva, you in the other gondola will be rowing across to the other bank of the Neva to catch your troika, which will be in waiting. And now, God be with you !"

Pushkin paced the room in wildest excitement, tearing his dishevelled hair.

Sophie meanwhile set about restoring her friend to consciousness, and, unfastening her bodice, sprinkled her face with water. Dying, she still thought of others.

At length Bethsaba began to revive ; but as she opened her eyes she buried her face in the cushions.

"I have arranged everything with Aleko," said the dying girl, in a low, contented voice. "You have only to do exactly what he tells you. I leave you my pink dress, and the platinum diadem. You will soon know when you are to wear them. Why, Pushkin, how can you be so useless ? Why have you not written it all down in my will ? Now, do not forget the pink wedding-dress, and platinum diadem. Old Helenka, too, I bequeath to you ; she has always been a good, faithful nurse to me. You may trust her through thick and thin. Now, Aleko, give

Bethsaba' pen and paper. She must write to tell the Princess not to expect her; as she is not coming back at present. Now write, dear one: 'Your Highness, my honoured Godmother; Sophie is ill and in sore need of my care. I must stay here until the Lord take pity upon her.—Your godchild, Bethsaba.' Now, dear Aleko, send off this note to the Princess, that she may not be uneasy. And as soon as you are ready, give me my will, that I may sign it."

Sophie read it through.

"How many blots there are!" she whispered, and a smile lit up her deathlike face. Those blots were Pushkin's tears. Sophie made merry over them, and wanted Aleko and Bethsaba to join in her merriment. She wrote her name in large clear handwriting, and gave back the pen to Pushkin. Then she put both her arms round his neck and drew him down to her.

"To-day you still belong to me! Let me look once more into those eyes which have been so long a sweet home to me! Oh, it was a Paradise on earth! I thank you that you let me know such exquisite happiness! I thank you for the truth and tender love with which you blessed me!"

And she kissed him countless times. Then, letting her arms sink, she motioned him away. It was the last caress.

"Aleko! Bethsaba! I want to see you embrace each other—now at once, while I am still alive and can see it! If you love me; if you would have me know you to be sincere; if you place any value on my blessing—embrace each other."

And so across the dying girl's bed they laid their arms on each other's shoulders.

"Ah, that is right! And now, kiss each other—on the lips. Not like that; you have hardly touched each other; it was such a cold kiss. Give her a real one!"

And, laying her hands on the bowed heads, she drew them together, until their lips united in a kiss,

her hands resting the while as if in the act of blessing. Then raising her transfigured face to heaven, and, folding her hands, she breathed, scarce audibly—

“Mother, I have saved you from sin !”

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### NOT ONLY A BULLET STRIKES HOME.

THE Czar was holding a special review.

The usual parades took place on the 21st of May, the day of the patron saint, Nicholas, and on the 20th of September ; but this year there was an additional review of the household troops alone. They are distinct from the rest of the army ; each regiment has a different uniform. The Life Guards wear white uniforms, with shining, gilt breastplates ; the Cuirassiers, light-blue tunics, with white, plated cuirass ; the uniform of the Jerusalem Regiment is crimson-red, with gilt breastplate. The ranks, from officer down to corporal, are all knights of the Order of St. John, and even the common soldiers are all of the nobility.

And every regiment boasts its past, its history, which passes on to the successors as a tradition, and keeps up the glory of its name.

The regiment of St. John of Jerusalem was so cut to pieces in two battles, that in one battalion only eighteen men were left.

The Preobrazenski Regiment has the proud distinction of having deposed Czar Ivan, and set Elisabeth in his place. Every man in the regiment received his patent of nobility.

The Ismailovski Regiment bears on its colours the trophies of seven conclusive battles. At Borodino, half the troops remained on the battlefield, and not a single man came home without a wound. These regiments compose the aristocracy of the Life

Guards. The rest of the household troops, too, are characterized by a brilliant variety of dress. Hussars in uniforms of the most varied colours, cuirassiers, mounted grenadiers, pontooners, Cossacks, Asiatic hordes with their fantastic arms, Kirgisians, Kalmucks with their slender spears, their arrow-laden quivers on their backs; Circassians in their scale-armour, with their pointed helmets; and then the long row of cannon, the ammunition waggons, painted green, the pontoons, the flotilla on wheels—and the whole mass drawn up on a boundless plain in squares, in geometrical lines, and advancing, charging, halting motionless as a wall, at the word of command, like a machine.

May he not rightly deem himself a god who with a gesture can set all this in motion, or make it stand? And they only need a second gesture to charge and dye the ground beneath them with their blood.

When the household troops advance from St. Petersburg, it means that the army is on a war footing, and is taking the field. Then let every man concerned summon all his strength.

In the centre of the Field of Mars are pitched the sumptuous tents of the Czar, the foreign ambassadors, and the members of the government; but the Czar himself rides at the head of his suite, and passes the assembled troops in review. As he thus rides past the separate regiments, they salute him with welcoming stanzas, rhythmical as the chorus of a giant theatre, with rifle, sword, and lance held rigid at the command "present arms." The Czar's face beams like a day in summer; every one sees again in him the hero of Leipsic. The inspiration of the army has communicated itself to him.

And in the ranks of these men who present at the word of command are those who have been conspiring against him. In the sabretache of the officers is to be found the "Catechism of the Free Man."

But the single word "Forward!" suffices to change

the whole temper of the troops; the conspiring regiments will charge down on the foe with shouts of "Long live the Czar!" When he shows them the battlefield, they forget all their complaints and grievances—forget that they are seeking to kill him—and rush into the fight ready to sacrifice their lives.

So it is with the Russian people. Their striving after freedom is silenced when there is hope of war. The private, freely shedding his blood on foreign soil, believes that therewith he will fertilize his native meadows. The priests have indoctrinated him with the belief that he who falls in a strange land to the enemy's bayonet will live again in his own country, where he will find parents, wife, and children once more; and, if he was a serf before, will rise again a free man.

After the review of the troops, the Czar himself takes the command, and a series of brilliant manœuvres begins, thought out by himself. According to the then science of war, they were intended to be a masterpiece of the system of attack in close order. His aides-de-camp are dashing from battalion to battalion with orders, their spirited horses flying off in all directions. The orders are given by the Czar himself, who watches their fulfilment through a field-glass. Suddenly an adjutant dashes up to him.

"Sire!"

"What is it? Make short work of it!"

The enemy's cannon are already thundering upon the attacking column.

"Sire," says the officer, "Duchess Sophie Narishkin has just delivered up her noble soul to Eternity."

The Czar instinctively put his hand to his heart. It was there that he was struck! And yet the cannon was only firing blank ammunition.

The sword he was wielding sank in one hand—the Czar covered his face with the other.

"*It is the punishment for my faults,*" he uttered, in a faltering voice.

What a change had come over the brilliant hero—

the semi-god. In his place sat a bowed figure; a man crushed to the earth by fate.

However deafening the hurrahs—however much the earth may vibrate under the tramp of warlike horses and horsemen—their leader's soul is fettered by the words, "Sophie is dead."

Miloradovics, the general in command, sent to ask instructions from the Imperial Commander-in-Chief for the next movement.

"Call them back!" was the answer. "Send the troops back to barracks. The review is over."

And turning his horse, the Czar rode back to his tent, with bowed head. They who saw him return, hardly recognized his white face. The generals of division had great work to disentangle their troops, and get them into position again. A murmuring arose among the men, as though a battle had been lost.

The Czar not even awaiting the march past of the regiments, who were wont to defile past him with pipe and drum, left the whole command to the Grand Duke; and throwing himself in his troika, drove back to the Winter Palace.

There he hastened to his study. On it were spread important, weighty documents containing epoch-making decisions for people and nations—only awaiting his signature. The Czar's eyes rested sadly upon them, reading in them, not what was written upon them in ordinary characters—but the *Palimpsest* with which fate ever crosses the carefully thought-out plans of mankind.

Then, seizing all the documents—painstaking labours of many a night—he made them into a roll, and throwing them on to the fire, watched them, a prey to the flames. They were all to have been Sophie Narishkin's dowry.

Ere long they were a heap of ashes.

Then, sitting down, he wrote a letter. It contained but two words. "Come back."

The envelope was addressed to Araktseieff.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE RENDEZVOUS.

THERE is something marvellous in the summer nights of the extreme North. Foreigners find it harder to accustom themselves to them than they do to the long winter nights, with their cruel severity. The evening glow lasts till midnight, and then begins the dawn. It seems endless until the first stars appear in the still clear sky, and under them the brilliant planets, Venus and Jupiter, burning in the firmament like diamonds on the surface of a golden lake. The pale moon describes its short orbit, a superfluous luminary ; and on the Feast of Masinka the half hour of actual night is impatiently awaited, in order to let off fireworks on the forty islands of the Neva. (For by daylight it is no use to send up rockets !) Street lamps are not lit in St. Petersburg at all during this month. Nor in the apartments of Korynthia's villa are lights needed on the evening of this 20th of June. The sky diffuses light enough until eleven p.m., and a little twilight will not seriously disturb those of whom we are about to speak.

Korynthia, in some agitation, has strayed—who can tell how often in the course of that evening—on to her verandah ; and let her eyes rove over the surface of the mighty river below. It, too, is golden in the evening light, and, like the Russian pictures of saints, on a golden ground is reflected in its sheen the capital with its rows of palaces, the dome and columns

of St. Isaac's, the florid architecture of the Exchange, the bridge of Holy Trinity, the scattered islands from amid whose wooded heights the varied forms and shapes of country houses peep, with roofs red, blue, green, gilded, and pagoda-like. And among the islands are darting boats, gondolas, canoes of every kind and description. Some rowed by twelve boatmen; others by a solitary dreamer—the one flashing along at lightning speed; the other letting himself drift on with the stream. The song of the boatmen is in the air.

In the uncertain light, their figures stand out like black silhouettes. Korynthia asks herself which of the gondolas is bringing to her him she is expecting—which is the silhouette of his figure?

To the watcher, the last half hour seems longest. Korynthia turns from the balcony to the interior of her room, and gazes once more at herself in her mirror. You are beautiful, very beautiful, says her mirror—that white costume lends you quite a youthful appearance, leaving as it does, the rounded marble of the arms bare to the shoulder. Your wealth of fair hair is not stiffly arranged, but floats in two thick tresses. No ornament of any kind, bracelet or earring, enhances your charms. The confident champion enters the battlefield without helmet or shield. Even the wedding-ring is absent. You are beautiful indeed—says her mirror.

And beside the mirror hangs a picture, set in a thick gold frame. It is the picture of a young girl in the garb of a mythical shepherdess—tender and delicate as a dream. Korynthia had received it some years ago, a present from the Czar. She may possibly have divined even then that it was no fancy picture, but a portrait—she may even have guessed whom it represented. Within the last few days, she knows for certain. She has met the original. It was the portrait of Sophie Narishkin.

Certainly she might long since have known it from Bethsaba; have seen portrait and original often

enough, had she asked her. But, although lying was foreign to the nature of the Circassian king's daughter, she knew how to be silent; and had that much Armenian blood in her veins not to answer, when not directly questioned.

So the reflection in the mirror, and the portrait in the frame, were in close proximity. And comparison left the living reflection victor.

You pale child with your dreamy eyes, your lips, seeming to open in lament; your tender, shadowy frame, how can you think to rival the divine presence of a woman? What power can you have, melancholy dream-picture of another world, against this earthly woman whose beauty arouses and quenches passion; kills and inspires life? Do you possess an Aleko, he chooses himself a gipsy maid; and that is not you. Is he not himself a true gipsy; leading a vagabond, adventurous life? In a word: is he not a poet?

Time went on slowly. Korynthia opened the windows looking on to the park. A concert of nightingales came from the bushes. A butterfly—the night peacock's eye—flew in at the open window; taking her for a flower, it flew about her, not about the portrait. Then flew in another night moth, differing from others in that it emits a sound—an unpleasant shrill, yet melancholy hum. Its name is *Sphinx Atropos*. Why has it been called by the name of that one of the Parcae which severs the thread of life? Because its back and head are the exact counterpart of a death's head. Ss—h! The lady brushes away the weird moth; but it had found a refuge, it had flown across to the picture, and had settled in a corner of the frame.

At length the twilight deepens. A few impatient employees ~~let~~ off the first rockets from the pleasure gardens in the islands: Bengal lights are beginning to show on Krestovsky Island.

Ah, of course! It is Zeneida's birthday. The court calendar has found a place for her among the saints; there are great doings to-night in her

palace. And something more, perhaps—a sitting of the "Szojus Blagodensztoiga." Under every possible guise and excuse, it holds its meetings at the singer's house.

When Prince Ghedimin left home that evening, he had told his wife that he was commanded to the Czar, and would be away all night discussing important matters of State. It is therefore certain that he will be spending the night at Zeneida's, and Korynthia need not fear to be disturbed ; it is a case of tit for tat. Any moment may now bring *him*, the one so impatiently expected.

For as soon as the fireworks on the islands begin, they attract all the servants and watchmen yet awake. There is no one to keep guard on the winding paths of the park. The great clock strikes eleven ; every quarter of an hour four bells ring a carillon. At the last stroke of the clock she seems to hear the sound of approaching footsteps on the gravel. Who else can it be ? An aristocrat's step is so different from that of a mujik. She is right.

The new-comer, stopping at the door of the garden verandah, opens it with a key. His footsteps now announce his coming, as they hurriedly ascend the spiral staircase. Korynthia has studied the pose in which she will be surprised. Leaning over the windowsill, her face resting on her hand—a dreamy figure so absorbed in the song of the nightingales that she does not perceive some one approach her, bend over her, and breathe a soft kiss upon her lovely shoulder.

The Princess seems to rouse from her reverie with a start, as, with an air of smiling reproach, she turns to the stealer of the kiss, " Ah, how late you are ! " But as she sees *him*, she starts in reality. The kiss has been no theft. The perpetrator had but taken what was his own. It was her husband, Prince Ghedimin. Korynthia stammered out, " How early you have come home ! ".

" You just said how late I was."

"I was dreaming. I did not know what I was saying.. How did you get in?"

"By the garden verandah. You know that I have the key."

And now it occurs to Korynthia that that other, to whom she had given the duplicate, may even now be coming.

"Did you fasten the door?"

"No. For in five minutes I must be off again."

"But I beg you to fasten the door, and leave your key on the inside. You know how terrified I am of thieves."

"All right. I'll go back and close it."

During his brief absence, Korynthia wrapped herself in a thick shawl. She did not need the pretext of cold ; she was shivering with agitation.

The Prince returned.

"I must briefly tell you that I come from the Czar."

"Indeed ! And not from Fräulein Zeneida's soirée?"

"No, my love. I come from the Czar and Czarina."

"Of course ; if you say so."

"You will not doubt it when I tell you what I have witnessed."

"Pray begin."

Korynthia remains by the window, to announce by the sound of voices to that other that she is not alone.

"His Majesty has for the past two days repeatedly commanded me to his presence to deliberate certain matters of State ; yet each time he has either been shut up in his room, and I have not been admitted, or if he has appointed me to go to him to Czarskoje Zelio, he has gone to the Hermitage. This evening I was commanded to Monplaisir. I traversed every room, right and left, until at length I found him on the upper verandah with the Czarina. Three times, four times, I saluted the Czar ; but he took no notice

of me. The Czarina signed to me to remain where I was. The Czar stood leaning against the marble parapet, motionless as a statue, his eyes fixed upon the Neva. The Czarina as fixedly, almost in fear, watching his eyes. Hundreds of boats were gliding over the smooth surface, crossing each other, shooting hither and thither. Suddenly a large barge came in sight, going down stream, rowed in slow rhythmic measure by eight boatmen. The barge was lighted by lamps fastened to poles; in the centre was a coffin, draped with a light blue satin pall. In the open coffin lay a young girl, shrouded in white, a wreath of myrtle on her head. Round it stood choristers singing a funeral chant, which ascended to where the Czar stood—

‘Ah! the day of tears and mourning,  
From the dust of earth returning,  
Man for judgment must prepare him.’

It was a body being borne across the Neva. ‘As it passed Monplaisir, one could read conspicuously on the lid, placed beside the coffin, the name studded in golden nails—SOPHIE NARISHKIN. Yes, you may well draw your shawl about you, madame! It is cold, is it not?’

The Prince had no idea of the effect of his words; he was still seeing what his memory had impressed upon him, not what was before him. He continued—

“Human language has no words to express the anguish at that moment imprinted on the Czar’s countenance. With glowing eyes, convulsed lips, and gathered brows, he stood there clenching his hands; and whilst with his eyes he followed the barge, a gigantic struggle seemed working within him. I have witnessed much sorrow in my life; never did I feel such sympathy for a man as for this one! He dared not betray his feelings, for the Czarina was standing by his side. She, too, studied his face with great attention. Suddenly she bent towards him, and taking his hand in hers, she cried, ‘Why do you not

weep? Why keep back your tears? It is your own dear child who is being borne to her last resting-place!' And, as if to open the font of his grief, she threw herself upon the Czar's breast and burst into weeping. And then the mighty ruler, before whom millions of men tremble, knelt before his neglected, forsaken wife, embraced her knees, and sobbing, kissed the hem of her dress, she joining her tears to his. It was a scene I shall never forget. The separated husband and wife were reunited in the hour of their bitter sorrow; they had come together again, the past forgotten. They leant over the balcony, saluting the disappearing barge with a last farewell! My eyes fill with tears as I think of it."

The Prince did well to weep. It was meet that one or other of them should shed tears at what had passed.

"Then, pressing his hand to his heart, the Czar gasped, 'And there was not a soul to follow her to the grave!' It was indeed a bitter thought. Even a beggar has some poor wretch to follow and mourn for him. And she had no one! Then a thought struck me, and I rushed to my gondola and came to you. I am the Czar's Prime Minister; you a Princess Narishkin. How would it be were we to catch up the funeral barge in a light, fast-rowing gondola, and act as Sophie Narishkin's mourners? What do you think?"

But the woman beside him had not depth of feeling enough to take her noble-hearted husband's hand in hers and, giving her tears free course, to say, "Yes, let us go; Sophie Narishkin is mine to mourn over!" No; that woman had more power of self-control than had the Czar. Her woman's pride, conquering the animal instinct—sometimes called maternal—within her, she could answer coldly and calmly—

"What are you thinking of? How should we account to the world for our uncalled-for escort? And then, it is too late; before I could put on a

mourning dress the barge would have got beyond all possibility of our reaching it. Besides, what do I care for Sophie Narishkin?"

She could even speak thus at that supreme moment. How true was the Muscovite scientist's classification —a degenerate cat. Even a normal cat mourns its young.

"What is Sophie Narishkin to me?"

Prince Ghedimin shrugged his shoulders, and taking out his handkerchief, carefully brushed away traces of tears. It is certainly not worth while to run the risk of making one's own nose red for the troubles of other people.

"All right. As it does not affect you, let us turn to something else. One other reason brought me here, which may perhaps interest you more. As I got into my gondola, my steersman handed me a letter, bearing on it, 'Pressing.' The letter was from *Alexander Sergievitch Pushkin*."

"Pushkin?" repeated Korynthia, in great agitation.

"Yes; from Pushkin. And the purport of the letter being so extraordinary that my understanding could not grasp it at all, I hastened to you to beg you to solve the riddle."

Korynthia felt the ground give way beneath her feet.

"Pushkin!" she stammered. "What should I know of Pushkin's riddles?"

"Listen. I will read the letter to you."

And in order to see better, the Prince now approached the open window, whilst Korynthia, retreating to the further side of the room, sought to conceal her agitation.

"Dear Ivan Maximovitch," the Prince read, "I find myself compelled with penitent heart to make you a confession. I have misused the high-minded confidence with which you laid open to me the sacred privacy of your home. Not as my excuse, but as a reason, I refer to my passion, which was stronger than

the respect I owed to you. *I have stolen the dearest, most carefully guarded treasure of your house!*"

("Is the man mad?" thought Korynthia.)

"If you desire to demand reparation for the affront, I shall be prepared to give you every satisfaction. You will find me in my country seat at Plestow."

"Yours most sincerely,

"PUSHKIN."

The Princess was amazed. The extent of the treachery never even dawned upon her.

"Well?" The Prince awaited an explanation. The best shield is cold bloodedness, the best weapon a lie.

With a shake of the head, Korynthia makes answer—

"But how does Herr Pushkin concern me? What have I to do with his mysteries?"

"Naturally, our friend Alexander Pushkin's proceedings have no special interest for you; nor should I desire it. But in this letter another was enclosed, having on the outside, in what seems to be a lady's handwriting: 'Princess Korynthia Alexievna Maria Ghedimin.' Probably in this we shall find the solution of the mystery. On that account, I must beg you to break the seal and communicate its contents to me—if you do not feel it desirable to keep them secret."

It was now the Princess's turn to advance to the window, in order to read. No sooner had she taken the letter than she exclaimed, in surprise—

"It is Bethsaba's handwriting!"

"You know her handwriting? I have never seen it."

Korynthia tore open the letter, and as she read her cheeks flamed. Then, crushing it in her hand, she cried, with hysterical laughter—

"Ha, ha, ha! He has run off with Bethsaba, and married her!"

Ivan Maximovitch took the matter as a joke. He had expected worse. Indeed he could rejoice that Bethsaba had been carried off, destined as she had been to St. Katherine's Convent. His wife's laughter still further misled him, and he thought well to join it. But, if his tears had met with but mediocre success, his laughter obtained him an open attack. The Princess first flung the crushed up letter at his head, then rushing at him like a fury, hissed out through her clenched teeth—

“This was your work! A plan between the two of you!”

“Who?” asked the Prince, in amazement.

“You—and your sweetheart—that Witch of Endor! You spun the web in which that girl was caught for Pushkin. You prepared the poison in which this dagger is steeped!”

“Madame, I am at a loss to understand why the fact of Pushkin's marrying Bethsaba Dilarianoff should excite you to such fury!”

Korynthia saw that by her vehemence she had almost been led into self-betrayal; so said calmly—

“You do not understand! This is no question of love, but of high treason! What would it matter to me if a Circassian Princess chose to fall in love with my lowest groom? He would probably be too good for her! But do you know why Pushkin has married this girl? In order to discover the Czar's secrets, which he confided to his daughter, and which were repeated to her friend Bethsaba. Now these secrets, through Pushkin, will become the common property of the Czar's enemies! Thus, you ruin yourself if you are on the side of the Czar; or the Czar, if you conspire against him. And this is what you two have done!”

Prince Ghedimin stood as if turned to stone. His wife had triumphed. Her words bore so clearly the stamp of truth, that defence was not to be thought of.

“Yes. It was a plot among you all!” continued

his wife furiously. "You availed yourselves of the illness of the one to entice the other from me. In order to detain me at home, and to prevent my watching over the child entrusted to my care, you sent Pushkin to me with a poem, and, instead of coming to receive his answer, the cowardly fellow steals away with a foolish, inexperienced girl from the very death-chamber of her friend. Out with such people! Such treachery, deceit, betrayal! You are worthy one of another! A pack of actors and actresses! Out of my room! Away with you!"

When women take to abuse, men are nowhere. Their reasoning powers are gone. Prince Ghedimin was a wise and good man, and innocent as a child of this crime; which, after all, was no crime at all. Yet after this torrent of abuse, he felt a very criminal who had brought about an act of the greatest, most irreparable evil, with the coldest calculation. And, in this frame of mind, was glad to be permitted to leave his home and seek his gondola.

We, who are in the secret, can aver that he did not even now know who Sophie Narishkin's mother was. But this Korynthia did not believe. She looked upon the whole scene as expressly got up to torture her; from the appearance of her husband at the very hour of the rendezvous, when he shed upon her love-lorn heart first the ice-drops of the funeral scene, then poured in the poison of the faithlessness of the man she adored.

It was a deadly poison, killing inwardly and outwardly. When Ghedimin left her, Korynthia clasping her two hands above her head, threw herself on the ground, sobbing bitterly. Then, as there was no one to raise her, she assumed a kneeling posture, her long plait hanging like serpents over her bosom; and, lifting three fingers to heaven, she gasped out with hideous vengeance—

"Oh, that I may repay you this some day!"

Her lips parted; the gnashing of her clenched teeth was audible. She was meditating something; her

eyes flashed fire ; she rose, and bared her white, exquisitely-formed arm to the shoulder. Then she pressed the rounded muscle of the upper part of her arm between her teeth and bit into it, sucking the blood as it flowed. It is a Russian superstition that whoever would ensure the fulfilment of his curse must, after uttering it, drink of his own blood.

The melancholy hum of the death's head moth in the corner of the picture-frame sounded like the murmur of a lost soul.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### A DIVIDED HEART.

ZENEIDA was celebrating three days of mourning in one. The first, Sophie's funeral; the second, Pushkin's marriage; the third, her own name day.

It had been Sophie's last wish that the wedding should precede her funeral.

Her soul in its ascent to heaven would see and hear the bliss of the two she had loved so dearly on earth.

According to Russian custom the lid was only screwed down on to the coffin just before it was lowered into the grave; with face uncovered are wanderers to the Hereafter borne to their last resting-place.

"Make the ceremony a short one!" Zeneida had said to the officiating priest.

The Patriarch of Solowetshk, whose feet had sufficient Russian understanding to suffer from a severe attack of gout that day, had sent a priest in his stead. Let his inferior, not him, have his beard shaved off if things go amiss. For if a priest rashly marry a runaway couple, the marriage is legal, but *the priest's beard is shaved off*, and he is forced to become a soldier. During the wedding ceremony, according to custom, two doves were set flying over the heads of the bridal pair. They fluttered for a time round the verandah, then let themselves down on to the catafalque at the head of the dead girl, where the crucifix stood; there, the one on the right hand, the

other on the left, above the head of the "martyr to love," they billed and cooed through the whole ceremony.

The dead girl might well be content. All had been done as she had directed ; Bethsaba wore the pink silk wedding dress ; the platinum diadem adorned her brow.

"That is over," said Zeneida. "Now follows the other—quick, quick !"

Bethsaba must now change the pink wedding dress for a black one for the consecration of the dead. Zeneida helped her to dress ; Pushkin waited without.

Bethsaba wept on and on, whether clad in pink or black.

Zeneida betrayed no tendency that day to sentimentality. Her utter callousness bordered on cynicism.

"But we shall see Sophie again in the next world, shall we not ?" sobbed Bethsaba.

"Yes, yes," muttered Zeneida. "And to which of you will Pushkin belong then ?"

That was the question.

Bethsaba was startled. Her large eyes remained fixed on Zeneida.

"And suppose he should belong to neither of you ?" continued Zeneida, drawing her strongly marked eyebrows together. "Or do you imagine that in the hereafter there will still be a Greater Russia crushing a lesser Finland beneath its heel, so that even then a fool will be found to open the gate of Paradise for some one else, while she herself goes into perdition ?"

This outburst revealed Zeneida's secret to Bethsaba. Rigid with dismay, she stammered out—

"You, too, loved him ?"

"Do not ask. Rejoice that he is yours, and do not wish yourself in the next world with him, but do your utmost to keep him to you in this."

"And you too, loved him !" repeated Bethsaba, sorrowfully.

"As you have discovered it, make your discovery of some use," said Zeneida, with seeming affectation. "Now, at least, you know from whom you have to guard him. Take care to keep him away from me. You know the sort of person I am. I take pleasure in enticing away the husbands, and causing the wives bitter tears. Your godmother was right. *I am a very devil.* Do not bring your Aleko back to St. Petersburg."

Bethsaba, throwing herself on Zeneida's bosom, embraced her.

"It is not true—not true—not true! You cannot deceive me. Tell me why you gave me Pushkin's heart, when you might so easily have kept it for yourself? There must be some weighty reason that induced you to do it. Tell it me; he is my husband now. I must know all about him. Even if it be—that he loves me not."

Zeneida, looking down with gentle smile on the young bride in her mourning dress, took her in her arms, and in fond embrace drew her to her heart.

"Then you do not think me so bad that you will need to guard your husband from me? Well, I will tell you from whom you must guard him. There is a lovely woman, more captivating than any you have ever seen—more seductive, intoxicating, more insatiable. Her name is 'Eleutheria.' She can entice the bridegroom from his bride, at the very altar rails, and the father of a family from his dear ones; and whom she once captivates, she keeps fast hold of till his last heart's blood is spent. His every thought is hers. It is this dread woman who is your rival. Guard your husband from all remembrance of her, for he is in love with her."

"'Eleutheria,' that means Freedom."

"She bathes in men's blood. It is that which makes her so beautiful. The only presents she will accept are hecatombs; and of hearts and men she only chooses such as are worth the price of gold and diamonds. The woman who has such a diamond to

call her own should guard him well. No pleasure-seeker, no drunkard, no gambler follows his besetting sin so readily as he whom Eleutheria has once enslaved. She has but to proclaim, 'My service demands the lives of men,' and thousands upon thousands of her worshippers answer, 'Here is mine; take it.' Beware that Pushkin be not among them!"

Bethsaba let the arms encircling Zeneida's waist sink, until they embraced her knees.

"Oh, unapproachable saint! You who rejected his heart that you might save his head. Speak, counsel me, how shall I set about doing that which you have charged me to do. It is so difficult. How shall I carry it out, that my work be successful?"

And Zeneida, raising the young bride, began to whisper the sensible advice to her that experienced women are wont to give their inexperienced younger sisters.

"Give up to him in everything. Do not contradict him. If he change his mind seven times in a day, change yours with him. Divine his thoughts, and forestall his wishes. If you know one thought of his, you can guess the others. If he be out of temper, do not irritate him with questions as to the reason. In such a mood the dearest face is unwelcome. Requite his love with your whole soul, and do not hide your joy from him. But do not flatter him, for that would turn him from you. Do your utmost to make his home pleasant. Let your house and his surroundings be pure and peaceful; yourself be ever cheerful and loving; never let him hear your voice raised harshly to your servants. If he desire to show hospitality, see that you make a good hostess. Do not keep him back from his manly pursuits. Never ask where he is going, whence he comes. Above all, never betray jealousy. What woman is there who can sufficiently stifle jealousy as not to feel it? Therefore must her heart, his advocate, keep watch that it clear him, even if eyes and ears accuse him. Never meet him with tearful

eyes, but keep a strict watch over your own actions. It is not necessary to play the prude with strangers, and to be always flying to your husband for protection; that would only render him ridiculous, and lead to many disagreeables. But never, whether from high spirits or feminine vanity, allow other men to pay you attentions which might arouse your husband's jealousy. If anything annoy you, tell it him gently and at once. Do not brood over it until it grows, and he reads the trouble in your face. Be easily pacified. Throughout, be yourself, equable, ever the same; for, in an evil hour, some fatal moment may suffice to recall his forsaken love, Eleutheria, to his mind, and to throw him again into her arms."

The little bride listened to her words as though they were the words of Holy Scripture.

"I will help you to keep him at home, and from returning to St. Petersburg. I will write you letters saying that the Czar is furious that he, whom he had chosen as his daughter's husband, should have been capable of marrying another on the very day of her funeral. It will not be true, for I shall show the Czar Sophie's will, and it will disarm him; but Pushkin must be made to believe that he is in disgrace, and dare not return to St. Petersburg without special permission. And we will expunge his name from the 'green book,' that he receive no more invitations to meetings. Let him be hidden in your arms until better times dawn—or what I far rather believe in—until the day of our extinction. When all is over, then you may come back to the world. Until then we must keep him in the belief that for him, exiled by his Czar, vilified by his peers, there is no other world but that of his love and Olympus. And are they not, in themselves, two worlds—two heavens?"

Pushkin entered.

"Not ready yet?"

"Leave us alone! I am just about to spoil your

wife. I am advising her how to keep you under her thumb. You are not to listen."

"All very fine. The first hour we are together she will tell me all about it."

The choristers in the chamber of death now began their solemn chant. It was a long ceremony, but it too came to an end. The priest, taking the two candlesticks, held them over the cross, whilst he spake the blessing, walked three times round the coffin waving incense, then placed the parchment containing the list of sins at the end of which was inscribed the absolution, into the dead child's hands as her passport into eternity ; after which the candles on the catafalque were extinguished. The two doves upon the crucifix continued their billing and cooing.

They carried out the coffin to the barge draped with funereal hangings. Many blossoms from the garden accompanied it ; it was covered with wreaths. The blue, green, and red lights glared in the twilight. The choristers continued their chant, the gentleplash of the oars marking time to it. Long those left behind gazed after the departing boat, until the next wooded island hid it from their view.

"She has gone on her journey!" said Zeneida ; there were no tears in her eyes. "Now it is your turn. Quick ! No leave-takings ; they are so wearisome. Be off with you ! I have my guests to see to ; a right merry company. I must hurry back. One kiss is enough, Bethsaba ; you may give the others to your Aleko. Take quickly with you what is yours."

"Alas ! that is impossible," sighed Pushkin, who had the bad habit of being unable to keep back what was in his mind. "One part, she, who is gliding away in that gondola, has taken with her ; a second part, you take : to this poor child belongs only the remainder."

"That is not true," returned Zeneida, with proud, radiant face. "She who has gone back to heaven has bequeathed her part in you to your wife ; she, who is here, has, even now, given up to her that which she

might have possessed. Bethsaba knows all about it. You are hers, wholly, entirely. And now, God be with you!"

And she held out her hand to him. The allies of the new epoch did not kiss in greeting.

And as Pushkin pressed the hand, a ray of joy passed over Zeneida's countenance. Freemasons have a sign by which they recognize each other in hand pressure. *Pushkin had not given the sign this time.*

Already he had forgotten his former love. To the new one, to whom he had plighted his marital troth, he belonged wholly, entirely.

It was as "she" had desired; and smilingly Zeneida waved her white handkerchief to the vanishing gondola, which a troika awaited on the opposite bank. Only when she could see it no longer did she hide her face in the said white handkerchief, and whether it was bedewed with tears or not that handkerchief alone can tell. She did not remove it from her eyes, until her gondolier addressed her.

"If you please, madam, the rockets on Kreskowsky Island have begun."

"Ah yes. You are right. The third funeral awaits me!"

With that she hastened into her gondola, and within its closed curtains sang in a low voice—

"By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept,  
For they that led us away captive required of us a song,  
Saying: Sing us one of the songs of Zion.  
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem; let my right hand forget her cunning."

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### SPARKS AND ASHES.

ZENEIDA'S gondola glided quickly past the funeral barge, back to Kreskowsky Island. Her guests were entertaining themselves without her. They were used to do so.

The conspirators were largely represented ; even Pestel, from far-off Nikolajewsk, was there. To-night the conflicting parties were to measure themselves ; the decision was to be made which plan should be the accepted one. The one which should give freedom by means of the Czar ; or that which, regardless of him, living or dead, should carry the work to its completion.

As the fireworks commenced, the bojars withdrew from the gay scene to the roulette chamber.

There were three and twenty men, and Zeneida. Prince Ghedimin alone was still expected ; he was to come direct from the Czar.

He came.

He had a long envelope, sealed with five seals, in his hand.

In extreme agitation all awaited the opening of the document. The Prince cut the seals with a pair of scissors, opened the envelope, and there fell from it the ashes of some burnt sheets of paper ; as they had been reclaimed from the fire. It was the anxiously awaited charta reduced to ashes.

“I said so !” exclaimed Pestel, with triumphant countenance. “The whole thing was a comedy.

Scarce three months has it lasted. There's an end of fine words. Now to dark deeds!"

Nothing was left but to decide if *the deed* should be consummated.

They voted openly, and by name.

"There were twelve Ayes, and twelve Noes.

"There is still one to give the casting vote," said Pestel. "Here is the 'Votum Minervae.' Here is Zeneida. Her vote shall decide it."

Zeneida saw the deadly pallor which had overspread Ghedimin's face.

With calm voice she said, "Aye."

Thirteen to twelve. The majority for the deed. But when? That was the next question.

Pestel said, "At once."

Ryleieff moved that in September would be their best opportunity, at the concentration of the army.

"To-day," growled Jakuskin. "Not to-morrow!"

Fresh votes had to be taken.

"At once, or in September?"

Once more the votes were twelve to twelve. Again Zeneida was called upon to give the casting vote.

Upon her breath hung the decision whether the world at that very hour should be shattered to its foundations.

"In September," she said; and Ghedimin gave a deep breath of relief.

Pestel shrugged his shoulders wrathfully.

"Then it were better to put it off until May, to try the success of the concentration of the army in Kiev. There in the south we are the masters."

"Shame upon us!" growled Jakuskin. "We are twelve to their twelve, and dare not do the deed. Every one of us a Brutus. More than an Armada! Were I alone, I would do it myself."

The concluding set-piece of the fireworks was greeted by the crowd without with clapping of hands. The golden rain fell like a shower of stars from the sky.

"Very well. The 20th of September," whispered

the conspirators, as they shook hands with each other. Loud peals of laughter were heard among the gay company ; the health of the lady of the house was drunk with acclaim.

Upon the smooth surface of the Neva, under the shower of golden rain, gently glided the funeral barge, to its destination ; the dead lay with face serene ; and amid the applause and hand-clapping of the spectators arose the dirge—

“ Ah ! the day of tears and mourning,  
From the dust of earth returning,  
Man for judgment must prepare him.”

The psalm and noisy crowd were silenced. The golden sparks died out, the aches were extinguished. Morning began to dawn. Not a soul was to be seen on the Neva. Every one had gone home to sleep through the grey morning hours ; the forenoon in St. Petersburg is good for nothing else.

Even morning here has its special characteristics. The sky is white, and as it is reflected on the calm surface of the Neva, it seems like one plate of burnished silver, upon which the long streaks of cloud and the heavy foliage of the trees stand out black as night. Pomp of death in sky and earth !

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### DAIMONA.

THE mistress of Grusino, who ruled Araktseieff as completely as he ruled the empire, was neither young nor beautiful. She could not have laid claim to beauty even in youth, and her stature was of manly proportions.

There are plain women who can make themselves pleasant ; who, aware that they have not the advantages of good looks, lay themselves out to charm by their manner. But Daimona wanted to be beautiful. Her complexion was dark—she painted herself very red and very white ; but as her beautifying only extended to her face, leaving her neck its natural hue, it gave her the appearance of wearing a mask. Having no eyebrows, but desiring to obtain them by artificial aid, and being, moreover, extremely short-sighted, she usually contrived to paint first one, then the other, higher or lower than its fellow. Her teeth were blackened from much smoking and indulgence in sweets. In addition, she selected the most ridiculous and garish of costumes and colours, always overloaded with ribbons and jewels. When she spoke, it was in a man's ~~baritone~~, which, when agitated, broke into a sobbing squeak.

And this voice of hers, heard throughout the day, inspired fear in all around her ; for she only opened her mouth to scold and abuse. In her communications to her household, she made use of the most

singular punctuation: the cane formed a comma, a box on both ears a colon, and the knout a full stop.

And this woman was the delight, the goddess, the idol; of the all-powerful court favourite. The whole land knew the infatuation of the great statesman for her; whoever aimed at accomplishing any end in St. Petersburg must first make his way to Grusino; for a good word from Daimona outbalanced a whole waggon-load of letters of introduction, and whole sackfuls of merit.

And that good word was never given for nothing. Daimona understood her business; she had a carefully made out tariff for favours desired. So much for an official post; so much for a concession; so much for an order; so much to be left off from an undesired expedition to Siberia, with or without accompaniment of the knout on the way, on foot or by sledge. She could tell it all off by heart.

The most aristocratic men and women did not esteem it beneath their dignity, whenever they deemed it advisable, to present themselves with friendly or deferential mien to the mistress of Grusino, who, neither wedded in right or left-handed marriage to the favourite, was originally the cast-off wife of a sailor condemned to Siberia, and afterwards had served her time as a *vivandière* to the Ismailowsk Regiment, who had given her the *soubriquet* of the "squinting Diana."

And, withal, she had completely captivated the clever man, before whom a vast empire trembled. Araktseieff was only at his ease when throwing off the "iron mask." This he could do in the arms of the *châtelaine* of Grusino.

At court, in order to retain his influence, he had humbly to receive every affront and humiliation; to flatter, to be more courtly and diplomatic in manner than any other diplomat; the while raging internally, and filled with immeasurable pride and savage revolt at any and everything that opposed him. It was, in itself, a penance to him to have always to

converse in French, for it was the language of the court, and he who spoke Russian, ran the risk of being looked upon as a conspirator, or worse still, as a member of a learned society. And he hated the French with a deadly hatred! Their language, dress, manners, music, drinks ; their diplomats, their drama, and their philosophy! Then, too, he had carefully to keep watch over every word he uttered, and every glass he put to his lips. Not only lest the contents of the glass should be poisoned, but for fear of drinking too much! For he knew that the true man was revealed when he was in liquor. Even worse, he had to ape the ascetic ; for women's charms were an arch snare, in which his enemies would fain have trapped him. Thus he lived like a recluse, with the appetites of a Sardanapalus. And when, flying court atmosphere for a brief respite, he could seek refuge at home in his Eleusinian den, and, throwing off the affectations of the French language, dress, and mask, was free to resume the despised native Russian costume, and talk the good, old, true Novgorod dialect, in which the republican peasant of those days abused Czar and yeoman alike, he felt himself happy. Then he could vie with his well-mated companion in good round oaths ; beat her in the morning ; kiss and make friends in the afternoon over the flogging of the peasants, menservants, and stewards who came in their way ; and get drunk together at night. Daimona was a match for him in every form of excess. If he were violent, she incited him to increased violence ; if he would vent his wrath on some one, she found him a human object on which to vent it, seconding him with all a woman's refinement of cruelty.

When the master showed his face at Grusino there was a hurrying and scurrying hither and thither ; lamentations, groans, and blows ; eating and drinking to excess ; music and dancing through the streets ; *battues*, dog-fights, mad revels of every description, and, at least, one *swacha*, "girl market." For the

Sultana provided her Padishah with his Feast of Bairam.

In fine, Prince Alexis Andreovitch found in the hideous Daimona, his other self; and this made her more precious to him than all the beauties under the sun.

One day that fine fellow Zsabakoff presented himself with countless bowings and cringings before the mighty Daimona. Not this time in the torn garments in which he slipped into Pushkin's quarters, but attired as a man of position. He possessed different costumes for the different parts he had to play.

Herr Zsabakoff came to Daimona because he had learned that the Czar was sending an army against the Turks. The fact was known to none, not even to Araktseieff; only one man 'knew of it,' and that was the Czar's groom of the chambers, the same worthy individual who one evening had lent young Araktseieff the Czar's Vladimir star. This worthy groom of the chambers often did his friends a good turn. Thus, for instance, it was solely to do Herr Zsabakoff a kindness that he gave a glance at the Czar's papers while arranging them on his writing-table. What he there saw, no one, not even the ministers knew, nor did he proclaim it with beating of drums, but he sold the information without more ado. There is no reason for surprise at this. Other times, other manners. At that time, it had happened that University professors had been known to distribute to students on one day answers to the questions to be put to them on the next. But in this affair Herr Zsabakoff was not interested to speculate as to whether the Hellenic champions of freedom would be able to hold Missolonghi until the Russian army had advanced to their aid; but merely whether the Czar's plan that every soldier, beside his customary kit, should carry a flask, as a necessary equipment in campaign—consequently three hundred thousand metal flasks would be required. The contractor would make his fortune!

But the honest groom of the chamber had not only communicated this secret intelligence to friend Zsabakoff, but also to many other similar friends, who probably were hurrying on the production of flasks by day and night, for in the course of a fortnight, they must be ready. Naturally it would not be the lowest contract which would obtain the order, but he who best greased the wheels of the Intendant General's carriage. Herr Zsabakoff now came to the influential lady to entreat her to use her powers with the potent Intendant General to persuade the Czar to have *wooden* flasks made, instead of the unwholesome metal ones. Thus, at one fell swoop, would disappear all his metal-flask rivals ; Zsabakoff would remain in possession of the field, and could demand his own price. In order to lend emphasis to his request, he had brought a little present with him which would exactly become its charming wearer ; an antique tiara of brilliants, in the centre of which was an exquisite solitaire of unusual fire.

“Of course, that is merely earnest-money,” said the mistress of the house. “You are aware that in the case of such a large transaction I go shares in the profit.”

“Your Excellency has taken the very words out of my mouth. Rely upon it, I am straightforward with you—I always speak the truth. I always do the honest thing. Why, then, should I deny it ? According to the price of my contract I gain half a griva on each flask ; of that I will make over two kopecs to your Excellency.”

“I tell you what, you make your contract so that it brings in a profit of a whole griva, and give me four kopecs instead of two.”

Herr Zsabakoff agreed to this proposition. But Daimona was none too delicate of her guests’ feelings. One of her slaves was a jeweller, and expert in precious stones. Him she sent for, and, in Zsabakoff’s presence, had the ornament valued. This was her custom. She kept the slave specially for that office. The expert valued it at one thousand

five hundred roubles ; but had the centre stone been pure water instead of yellow, it would have been worth two thousand.

"You don't understand anything about it," screamed Zsabakoff. "Yellow diamonds are unique ; they are called *fantaisie*. Besides, it is an antique, and great people like antiques best."

"Quite true. All the same, a pure water solitaire would be worth five hundred roubles more."

"Do you hear," quoth Daimona. "Don't forget next time to exchange it for a handsomer and costlier one. And then I prefer it set in gold to this silver setting."

Zsabakoff promised to obey her behests, and took his leave with as much obeisance and kissing of hands as though he had received instead of given.

Some weeks later Zsabakoff came back more amiable and deferential than before.

"My word is as good as my bond," said he. "Instead of that worn-out old tiara I bring you a brand new one. Look at this stone, your Excellency. What fire ! how pure ! a perfect Golconda brilliant ! It dazzles the eyes like sunlight."

And he went on crying up the new ornament, until Daimona gave him back the old one for it.

"You may have this examined. I am positive your goldsmith will value it at three thousand roubles. And, in fact, it cost every penny as much. But I don't grudge it you. All I ask is that you write his Excellency by your special courier, post haste, that the matter must be at once decided. It is in your own interests. For every field-flask, you make four kopecs. I am off ; I have not a moment to lose."

And once more recommending the flasks to her Excellency's "immediate attention," Herr Zsabakoff rushing out, jumped into his carriage, drawn by three horses, and drove off as if possessed. This time he did not wait for Daimona to summon the jeweller.

Daimona was in haste to write to Araktseieff anent

the flasks. But writing with her was a slow process ; the pen did not readily obey her untutored fingers. Only when the letter was finished did she submit the jewels to her goldsmith. He, suspiciously examining the tiara, begged permission to test it in his laboratory ; then told her that, to a jeweller, it would be worth about three roubles. The brilliants were only Parisian paste ; the setting plated, not gold.

Daimona, at first, was merely surprised ; she could not believe the man mad enough to deceive her, in a matter concerning three hundred thousand flasks. It was such a clumsy trick ; such an unheard-of affront. A trinket worth three roubles was only the kind of present that would be given to a *vivandière*.

"Hi, Schinko !" screeched Daimona. Whereupon her factotum appeared, a handsome muscular fellow of the unmistakable gipsy type. "Take a horse at once, take three mounted men with you, and follow the man who just drove off with three horses abreast ! Seize, bind, bring him back ! See you do not come back without him !"

The next instant the gipsy was on horse, without saddle, galloping as if for his life. His three followers could scarce keep up with him. Daimona was satisfied that Schinko would soon come up with Zsabakoff.

But within half an hour, the three horsemen with Schinko at their head came back the way they had gone, and behind them a troika in which sat a man alone. But not as prisoner did he come ; it was the other way about, he drove them before him. From time to time he kept putting his head out of the carriage, threatening the galloping horsemen so ominously with his stick, that, as fast as their horses would go they tore homewards, looking back, now and again with scared faces.

"What's the meaning of this ?" shrieked Daimona, furiously pacing the hall. "What, run away—you let yourselves be driven back by one man ?"

Yes, when it is that "one man !" Arrived at the castle, and flinging back the leathern apron of the

troika, he sprang from his seat, roaring with all the power of his lungs after the runaways.

"You fellows! Just you wait! I'll teach you to molest travellers in broad daylight on the emperor's high way. A hundred lashes of the knout for each of you! I'll have you all fastened to the handle of the pump! Thieves that ye are!"

It was Araktseieff himself. Daimona was more furious than ever. Rushing down the entrance steps into the courtyard beneath, she stood, gasping for breath, before the new-comer.

"Why did you hound back my people? They were pursuing a thief who had robbed me! He brought me false stones, and stole the real ones. I will have him brought back—the thief!"

But the master of the house paid no attention to her. When he was by way of abusing some one, whoever it might be, he had no thought for anything else. His face was crimson as he alighted from his carriage, holding in one hand a stout knotted stick, in the other a flask by its strap.

Daimona thought that he was acquainted with the details of the affair, so seizing him by the collar of his cloak, she continued—

"It was Zsabakoff, do you hear, Zsabakoff! You surely have not given him the flasks yet?"

"Flasks?" retorted Araktseieff, amazed. "I've only got this one; and I can't offer you anything from it, for it's empty."

"Oh, the devil take you! The three hundred thousand flasks, I mean, that the army are to have in the Turkish War."

Now he was more astonished than ever.

"Three hundred thousand flasks? War? Give yourself time to breathe! What have you been drinking to-day?"

The woman cursed and raved. In a medley of words she mixed up weeks and months, kopecs and flasks, diamonds worth two thousand roubles, Misso-longhi and Omer Brione Pasha, and stormed on so

long that at length her lord and master, in a fury, flinging his empty flask at her, pushed her aside ; whereupon Daimona, to recover her wounded feelings, fell upon the jeweller, and struck his head with the *corpus delicti*, the paste tiara. Why had he said that a yellow diamond was not as good as a white one ? It was all his fault that the thief had stolen the real one, and made off with it.

And this was the affectionate reception of the weary statesman to his home. Perhaps others have shared his experiences—who shall say ?

However, at supper peace was restored ; and Daimona recounted to him the history of the field-flasks.

“ Well, my dear hen,”—this was his pet name for Daimona—“ you know more about it than I do, whose province it is, as General Intendant, to see to the fitting out of the army. “ I am on leave from court—ostensibly on account of my health. This that scoundrel Zsabakoff knew, hence he repossessed himself of his diamonds.”

“ But what is the matter with you ? ”

“ The matter is, that I am a follower of the Czar.”

“ Try to get cured of that ailment.”

“ I know that I shall be recalled ere long, and soon fall back into my old habits.”

“ Bungler ! If only you had kept the Czar’s favour until the field-flask contract had been delivered ! ”

“ Bah ! Say no more about it. Sing me something nice. It’s so long since I heard a woman’s voice.”

Alexis Andreovitch really meant it when he said he wanted to hear Daimona sing. Now the screech of a peacock was a swan’s song compared with Daimona’s croak. Her voice was out of tune, throaty, and harsh ; but if it pleased her lord, what matter ? And then the words of her song, with its refrain, “ Give him a taste of the knife ! ” In truth, an extraordinary ditty to choose ; and that it should just

have come into Daimona's head. Yet what so extraordinary in it, after all? For the fallen favourite's *chère amie* to choose a revolutionary song, when he had been dismissed from court by his imperial master, and when the matter of the flasks was not settled. Surely reason enough that he, who yesterday licked the dust from off the tyrant's feet, to-day should spit it back in his face!

And the fallen favourite did not interrupt her. He listened to every verse, enjoying the last so much that he chuckled with delight.

“Where did you hear that ridiculous thing?”

“You thickhead! Can't you guess? Didn't you yourself send the gipsy girl to me to be educated? We have made a thorough success of the job.”

“Right! Among the many pleasures that await me here is carrying on that joke to the bitter end. She drove my son to Archangel! Not a word have I heard from him yet. What have you been doing to the wench?”

“Just what you directed. If you want some fun we'll have her in.”

“Nothing better just now.”

Daimona sent a man in search of Diabolka. Meanwhile, she whispered something to Alexis Andreovitch, her painted eyebrows dancing with fiendish glee as she did so.

Araktseieff seemed to enter fully into the joke; he laughed so loud that he made himself quite hoarse, and striking his fist on the table, shouted—

“Good! Excellent! By Jove! That'll be worth seeing!”

Both were looking grave when the girl came in. She was hardly recognizable. A young lady in a long dress, wearing mittens; on her head the snood of a Russian maiden. She held both hands, in national style, hidden in the long sleeves of her dress, only withdrawing them to kiss the hand of her master and mistress. Her eyes she kept modestly fixed on the ground.

"Well, dear child, and how do you like being under your mistress's protection?"

In a low whisper the girl answered—

"Thanks be to my gracious master for having sent me where I am so happy."

Araktseieff could scarce repress his laughter.

"You speak like a book."

"That is not my merit, but that of the reverend Herr Prokop, who has spared no pains to give me the benefit of his instruction."

"Ah! You are quite a fine young lady, I see. You must sit down and have supper with us. Come, don't be shy! Here, you long-legged fellow, set a cover for the young lady! Here, you lout! Opposite me."

"It will be a great honour to your unworthy maid-servant to be permitted to sit at table with you; but I must ask forgiveness if I eat nothing. Good Father Prokop has inflicted the penance on me of eating no supper for a whole year."

"For what sin?"

The girl heaved a deep sigh.

"Your Excellency! you know the great sin I have committed, and for which I never can atone." And she sank her head remorsefully.

Was she really penitent, or was it only hypocrisy?

"And what do you do whilst others are having their meal?"

"I read the Psalms to them."

"What, you can read already? and the Psalms into the bargain! I should like to hear that. Bring her a Psalm-book. Now sit here, and read. Which one is it?"

The girl, sitting down as she was bid, rested the finger-tip of one hand daintily on the table, while with the fore-finger of the other she marked the syllables as she read, "Lord, the hea-then are come in-to thine in-her-i-tance."

"Wonderful! But do you understand what you are reading about? Who are the 'heathen'?"

"The *Turks!*" The girl spat out the words, as beseems an orthodox Muscovite.

"Who is the 'Lord'?"

Rising, the girl answered—

"Our august master, the Czar."

"And what is his 'inheritance'?"

"Greece."

"Very good," returned her master. "How well you have learned to read! And can you write, too? And so that you need no one to guide your hand, as when you wrote your first letter? Ah, ah! That was a joke!"

Then turning to Daimona, he said, so that Diabolka should hear—

"Why, you have made quite a lady of her."

"And I mean to make a good Christian of her, too," responded Daimona.

Diabolka, seeming not to hear, went on spelling out her psalm.

"Come forward, Schinko!" Daimona commanded the man standing behind her chair. "Now, have I not selected a good-looking husband for her?"

"Ah! I sent him to you, too, my lady. Is he not a certain 'brother' of your ward's?"

"That's why I treat him so well. A fine youth! I have no more faithful servant than he. The peasantry fear him like the very devil. He is my right hand."

"Then I can guess how many floggings he has already administered to them."

"I will give them their wedding. Then I mean to make Schinko my house-steward and Diabolka my confidential maid."

"I will provide the wedding presents."

Diabolka continued reading her psalm without interruption. Any other girl at least would have simpered when she heard talk of her wedding in presence of her bridegroom.

"Now we'll finish up supper with a little singing and dancing," said the mistress of the house, signing to Schinko.

"Ah! Can Diabolka not only sing sacred songs, but dance too?"

"She neither sings nor dances; she has another calling. There is some one else to do that."

Hereupon twelve pretty young peasant girls entered from a side-door, each with a lute in her hand, their faces expressing more repressed fear than pleasurable expectation. Behind them slid Schinko, a long whip in one hand, the other leading a small, hump-backed dwarf on a chain, like a bear, with a bagpipe under his arm. He was hideously ugly, with a hump behind and before, his large bald head sunk between his high shoulders. His face was the caricature of a man's face, and so distorted with smallpox that it seemed as if the lineaments, being so grotesque, the fell disease had tried to wipe them out; here and there remained a tuft of beard and whisker; he had but one eye. He was revolting to look upon; but when his cheeks distended with the bagpipes, he was a perfect monster. A worthier performer on the bleating goatskin could scarcely be imagined.

"That's classical music," said the master; "but what about the dancing?"

"Wait a minute. That's the best."

Going out once more Schinko returned with the *ballerina assoluta*, gripping her by the nape of the neck that she might not bite his hand. She was a deformity in woman's shape—a hump-backed dwarf, with long arms reaching to the ground; her stump nose hardly visible; matted hair growing down to her eyebrows; her mouth awry with great protruding teeth—add to this an evil, bestial stamp on all her features. Such was the creature who was to perform a ballet for the amusement of the lord of Grusino. She was clad in a dress of gold paper; therefore it did not matter if she tore it. She had been taught to dance as monkeys are, and knew she had to do it.

"Blow away, Vuk! Dance, Polyka!" cried Daimona, clapping her hands; and as the bagpipe began its melody, the dancer began her parody of a ballet.

dancer, making such pirolettes that with her long arms, not her feet, she chased away the chorus, accompanying the bagpipe with their voices.

"Hopsa! hopsa!" cried Schinko every now and then, and touched up the calves of the dancer's legs with the point of his whip, if she did not spring high enough in the air, at which she made furious grimaces.

Araktseieff and Daimona sank back in their chairs with laughter. The great statesman, the pattern of astute diplomacy, drummed his spurs on the table in his mirth; whilst Diabolka, without raising her eyes, ever continued spelling out her psalm, as though nothing were going on about her.

At the close of this edifying performance, the female monstrosity caught hold of the male by the collar of his coat, and twirled him and his instrument round in a waltz, Schinko cracking his whip the while, as though he were in a circus.

"Well, these two will make a pretty couple, I declare!" laughed the master. "We will celebrate both weddings together."

Upon which Daimona gave him such a sharp pinch on his arm that he cried out.

The very next day Diabolka's wedding-dress was put in hand. All Daimona's female serfs were at work upon it. Diabolka now usually dined at the minister's table, when he entertained the notables of the neighbourhood; all of whom were welcome guests when they could prevail upon themselves to kiss Daimona's hand. A dear repast, in truth!

But his guests had still more to put up with. When Araktseieff had drunk too much, he would grow quarrelsome, and come to blows with them. All the same, they would come back again next day and meet the same fate. A still costlier price to pay!

Schinko was the chief flogger of the palace; he had to execute all the scourging, whipping, and lashing with the knout. It was his office. He had no choice but to carry out orders. If his master ordered him to thrash corn, he must do it; if to thrash

mujiks, he must thrash them. Lucky that it was his part to administer, not to receive the lash. Moreover, he was a gipsy ; and gipsies, it is known, have stronger nerves than other men.

The eve of the wedding-day Daimona commanded Diabolka to try on her gay wedding-dress, and to show herself in it to the master.

He admired it, and gave the girl a slap on the cheek.

"Do you see ? I am glad you have grown at last into a respectable young woman. I raised you out of the mire into which you had sunk. Is it not a good thing to have become a well-behaved girl ? "

And Diabolka, falling on her knees before him, kissed his feet.

"Nice to be a bride, eh ? Now you love your cousin Schinko—don't you ?

The girl hid her face in confusion.

"Well, show how you can give a kiss. Where's Schinko ? "

But Diabolka would not be kissed. Schinko might wait till he was married.

"A sensible girl !" said her master, praising her. "Now take her to the priest that she may tell her prayers, and confess. To-morrow morning her bridesmaids and groomsmen shall fetch her back. You go with her, Schinko ! "

After she had gone, Daimona sent for the other bridal couple. They were worthy of each other, Vuk and Polyka.

The hump-backed bridegroom was dressed in a handsome sealskin coat reaching down to his toes, his cap adorned with a pair of hare's ears ; while the bride, with mouth all awry, was attired as a Turkish odalisque, making her more hideous than ever.

"Upon my word, they're a handsome couple ! " laughed Araktseieff. "I wonder if that great hunch will prevent her kissing him ? "

"That doesn't matter," returned Daimona ; "her arms are long enough to pull out his hair."

Nor did it need much encouragement for her to try it even before marriage ; a word would have sufficed to give proof of their connubial tenderness.

"It will be rare fun to-morrow !" said Daimona.

"A splendid idea," chimed in her lord.

"Are you satisfied with it ?"

"It's a masterwork."

"Well, if you love me, do as I do."

When was he not ready to do it ? It was the reason the brutal pair loved each other so well that there was nothing so mad devised by the one that the other was not ready to join in.

Song followed the carousal, Daimona began the "Knife Song," and Araktseieff joined in the chorus.

For the sweetest of all the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge is when a smooth courtier, whose wont is to flatter, to bow, and to scrape, in the privacy of his chamber can tune up a revolutionary song, and blacken his sovereign and fellow-courtiers to his heart's content.

"Let's have it over again ! Where's a glass ?" He always dashed his empty glasses against the wall. But instead of the glass, Schinko brought on his silver salver a letter, which a mounted messenger had just delivered.

Araktseieff at once knew the handwriting on the cover. Releasing himself from Daimona's arms, he sprang up from the divan, and hastily wiping his mouth, pressed the letter to his lips and forehead ; then said in a hollow voice—

"Give me the scissors."

"What do you want with scissors ? Break it open with your fingers."

"Give me the scissors when I ask for them !" shouted he angrily, and snatched roughly at the pair hanging from Daimona's girdle. And as with trembling hand he cut the seal, he said feverishly, "One does not break the Czar's seal."

"The Czar's seal ?" repeated Daimona, astounded.

It did not take Araktseieff long to read his letter.

Beside the signature were two words only—"Come back!"

"Bring water! Cold water!" he cried imperiously. And as Schinko, not knowing the wherefore, returned with a bucket of water, his master, seizing the utensil with both hands, took a deep draught from it.

Daimona's astonishment increased more and more.

"What is the matter?"

"I must set off this very instant!" gasped Araktseieff. "Hurry, Schinko; let them put the horses to; twelve horsemen to accompany me with torches; and one to ride on before to secure post horses. Fly!"

"You are going away?" asked Daimona, amazed.

"Instantly! The Czar commands!"

"And you hurry back at his request?"

"As a Cossack pony answers to his master's whistle."

"And will not be taking part in to-morrow's sport?"

"I must deny myself the gratification."

"You are going to leave me?" asked she, reproachfully. "You do not love me any more?"

"The Czar has deigned to write me with his own hand," returned Araktseieff, handing her the letter.

"What do I care about his writing?" screamed Daimona; and snatching at the letter, she cut out a piece with her scissors, which so enraged Araktseieff that he struck her violently on the hand.

"You have struck me! You are going away, and have struck me!" and, turning her face away, the woman wept bitterly.

But Araktseieff had no time to pacify her now.

"Enough! This means that the crisis is past."

Had there been an ocean before him, he must have swum across it. How much more then a few woman's tears!

The celebration of a double wedding will come off, but he will not be there to enjoy the fun.

"Quick, quick, Schinko! Then come to my room to shave me."

While at Grusino the minister was in the habit of letting his beard and moustache grow to please Daimona; but always had it shaved off before returning to St. Petersburg.

"Take care you don't cut me with your razor," were his first words to Schinko, as he began. Schinko was the only one there to whom he would entrust his throat. "If you slash my face, I'll shoot you dead."

His travelling pistols lay close to his hand. Schinko was cautious, and completed the operation without disfiguring his master's face. A lucky thing for Araktseieff. For the gipsy was resolved at the slightest slip of his razor to cut his master's throat, that he might not have the chance to carry out his threat. Never had Araktseieff been nearer to his grave.

As he finished, the bells on the horses' necks were heard in the courtyard below.

Thrusting the Czar's letter into his breast pocket, Araktseieff hurried away to say good-bye to Daimona.

She had locked herself up in the room.

"I have gone to bed."

"Then, good-bye, my dear!" He had no time for more.

Daimona, from her window, could see the carriage dash away, with its escort of torch-bearers.

It was pitch dark, the rain coming down in torrents. Weather in which one would not have sent out a scullion.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### NOT KNIVES ALONE WOUND HEARTS.

ARAKTSEIEFF, on arrival at the palace, was received by Chevalier Galban.

"What has happened here?" he asked, as he changed his travelling dress for his uniform.

"A startling change. Since his daughter's death the Czar has become reconciled to the Czarina, and is with her constantly. Every diplomatic action has been broken off. The Greek deputation has not been received, the commanding officers of the various regiments of the Guards have been despatched back to their colonies."

"And what do the women say to all this? That's the main point."

"The women are deucedly hard to get at just now. Since the reconciliation of the Czar and Czarina, domestic fidelity has become the rage in St. Petersburg. Every man is seen driving out with his wife. Even Princess Ghedimin ostentatiously parades everywhere on her husband's arm; and conducts herself so prudishly that she scarce returns my bow."

"And Zeneida?"

"Is in disgrace. The Court Chamberlain has intimated that it would not give displeasure in high quarters if she were to pass the coming season in a more genial clime. Upon which she at once sent in her credentials as court singer. She is having

a sale of her furniture, and is preparing for immediate departure."

"And the cause of disgrace?"

"Pushkin. You are aware that he was to have married Sophie Narishkin?"

"That is—it was a piece of medical jugglery. They proposed to prolong the invalid's life, and make it happier by her betrothal."

"All the same Pushkin was her husband elect, and the Czar was deeply hurt that the very day of Princess Sophie's funeral, Pushkin should go and get married to the lovely Bethsaba, whom he ran away with from the Ghedimins'!"

"Hullo! So he ran away with the little Circassian princess!"

"The Czar was very cut up at his heartlessness. Hence his displeasure with Fraulein Ilmarinen."

"But what had she to do with it?"

"She was witness to the marriage."

"What, she? And she who worshipped Pushkin! That is a dangerous woman!"

"Fortunately she can't do much harm now. She begged an audience of the Czar; but his Majesty answered that he would only receive her in your presence."

"Then it shall be a hot reception for her! Thanks for the good news!"

And Araktseieff hastened off to the Hermitage, where the Czar was to be found before noon.

Alexander extended his hand with emotion to the returned favourite, who had travelled night and day to obey his behest.

"My only true friend!" he said in a low voice.

"Not the only one, Sire. The Czarina stands first."

"You are right. We have come together again, and I am only beginning to learn that in her I have won back a whole world. I grudge the moments which this pile of drafts causes me to spend from her."

"I am at your orders, Sire!"

"That will greatly help. Just you look through this sheaf of papers, which I can make nothing of ; and execute everything according to your own judgment."

"I will not stir from here before I have gone through them all."

"Among them you will find a petition for a farewell audience from Fräulein Ilmarinen. Answer in my name, that I am willing to receive her, but solely in your presence. Now, I am off to church, where I shall meet the Czarina. We are holding a Requiem-Mass for poor Sophie Narishkin."

Araktseieff made feint to be hearing this for the first time ; and in consequence of the melancholy surprise went through a theatrical scene of up-turned eyes and exclamations, ending up with, as he kissed the hand of the Czar—"I feel that my heart is torn out of my body at this mournful news, Sire !" He was the only man in the world who secretly exulted over the news of the unhappy child's death.

The Czar left him alone in his study ; and the favourite found many more important matters to attend to than Zeneida's petition. From the multitudinous papers it was plain to see that when the cat's away the mice begin to play. Everything was tending to lead the Czar back to the paths of liberalism. Here must the first clearance be made !

A few days later Zeneida was surprised, in the midst of her packing, by a visit from Jakuskin.

"I have come to tell you how glad I am that you are leaving us."

"A singular kind of farewell."

"But comprehensible ! It is well for you that you are going ; and well for us too. The *rôle* you were playing is at an end, and I am glad of it !"

"So it seems."

"Araktseieff is returned, and his iron hand is wielded over our heads. You, fair Madonna, had exiled him with your refined arts. Now it has become evident that the refinement of intrigue does not

pay in our atmosphere. The old tyrant is back, and the Czar more completely in his power than ever."

"I know it. I have had intimation that a farewell audience will only be accorded me in his presence."

"And you are going?"

"Decidedly. I must reconcile the Czar with Pushkin."

"Is that your only reason?"

"What else should keep me here?"

"The wish to depose friend Araktseieff?"

"I have no power to do that."

"Well, then, I have."

"By violence?"

"It is already done. To-morrow morning will no longer see him in St. Petersburg. I have struck him to the heart, and not with a dagger. His fate is already sealed. He is as good as dead and buried, though he has no idea of it. Read this letter."

Zeneida's face changed from ghastly white to fiery red as she hastily perused the letter handed her by Jakuskin. Her lips parted with surprise and horror as she read.

"You are terrible men!" stammered she, as she gave it back.

"We understand what we are about, eh?"

"And he knows nothing of it?"

"There is not a man about him who dares to make it known to him. Diabolka wrote me herself. I have copied her letter, and sent the whole affair to the Czar through the Sophienska post. May he learn it from the lips of the Czar; or, what is still more probable, may it fall into his own hands in opening the Czar's letters. Ah, Zeneida! If only he received the letter at the very time that you were having audience! If only you could see him then! Oh, I could fain envy you the satisfaction of that moment!"

Zeneida's audience was appointed for the next day.

It was the Czar's usual habit, on leaving Monplaisir at five in the afternoon, to pass a short time at the Hermitage, which stood near the Winter Palace, and had been a favourite resort of Catherine II. His library here, where he transacted business, was furnished very simply. Hither was brought to him the letters which came by the Sophien post. The apartment was now reserved to Araktseieff's use, who sat there from morning to evening, settling, on his own responsibility, the affairs of the vast empire in the name of the Czar. Matters of home and foreign policy, religion, education, trade, finance, all were dependent on his sole will. Ministers and privy-councillors alike, his puppets. Alexander would take no part in anything—signing, unread, whatever Araktseieff put before him. Those drafts laid aside by him were mere waste paper.

To-day, too, found the favourite hard at work at the Czar's own writing-table, Alexander restlessly pacing the room, for Fräulein Ilmarinen alone had been granted audience that day.

Zeneida presented herself at the appointed hour. She was dressed in deep mourning, her golden hair forming a striking contrast to her sombre attire.

The Czar advanced to meet her, but his manner was marked by extreme coldness.

Araktseieff feigned not to see her; did not lift his eyes from the papers before him.

"Fräulein Ilmarinen," said Alexander, "you desired to speak with me personally. You may speak."

"Will your Majesty forgive the boldness of my request, but I have papers to place before you, which the owner entrusted to me on sole condition that I delivered them personally into your own hands. These papers form the diary of the late Princess Sophie Narishkin!"

With a deep sigh, the Czar exclaimed, "Poor child!" his voice trembling with agitation.

"It was her last wish, and I must fulfil it."

"You were with her, then, in her last hours?"

"And afterwards. She had sent for me."

"It was you who closed her eyes?"

Zeneida bowed her head silently.

"I thank you," said the Czár, and taking from her the white-bound diary, he held out his hand to her.—a soft, thin hand—but the action was not a cordial one.

Zeneida kissed the hand.

"Have you any wish, Fräulein Ilmarinen?"

"Only one, Sire! That you should graciously please to read the last three pages of Sophie's diary *in my presence*."

The Czar glanced back, as though to ask Araktsieff's permission. Then only did he resolve to accede to her wish, and opening the diary, he read.

He bit his lips to conceal his emotion. But Zeneida well knew what it was he was reading; she knew the whole contents of the diary, as well as those last confused lines written by the convulsed hand of an unhappy child, looking forward with yearning and dread to the cold embrace of death. And the Czar, as he concluded the last page, looking up at Zeneida, saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

Mutely he nodded his head and sighed.

"She wanted me to read this to exonerate Pushkin, did she not? She wished it so. She had a great, noble soul!"

"Indeed she had, Sire!"

"And it was at her desire; and Pushkin was only fulfilling her last wishes in acting as he did?"

"He could not have done otherwise."

"I believe it. He could not have done otherwise. And yet I cannot reconcile to myself the thought that he did it. That in the very same hour that he had covered the face of one bride with the funereal veil, he could draw the bridal veil over the face of the other! He had to do it! And yet it seems incomprehensible to human understanding how there can be a whole eternity in one short hour of time; how in

one short hour, a man can fly from the Arctic Pole to the Equator ; how, in one and the same moment, a man can mourn over a dead love, and marry a living one ! ”

“ But if he had loved her previously ? ” asked Zeneida, softly .

“ What did you say ? ”

“ If that which he experienced for her who was gone was but the adoration and boundless reverence for a being of another world, whose wings were already bearing her heavenwards when first he knew her ? If all the affection, tenderness, devotion which led him to the feet of his worshipped bride, were but sacrifices offered at the shrine of a saint, to keep her in life ? ”

Alexander struck his forehead with his hand.

“ You are right ! I never inquired into it. Never asked him if the dream of love were more than a sick girl’s fancy ? He suffered himself to be bound by that dream. That was the whole of it. In his heart he loved another, and would have sacrificed himself for her. It was all my doing, my fault—for everything I do is faulty, and everything that goes wrong is through me ! ”

These words were spoken by the Czar of All the Russias, not in bitterness, but with the deep melancholy of conviction. It moved the heart to pity.

Suddenly he turned to Zeneida.

“ Do you wish me, then, to grant Pushkin permission to return ? ”

“ No, Sire. He is in good hands. Whoever is a true friend to him would rather desire that he should live a happy life, *far from St. Petersburg !* ”

This surprised Araktseieff. He threw his pen down, and scrutinized Zeneida.

“ And for yourself, have you no wishes ? ” continued the Czar.

“ I am leaving St. Petersburg to-morrow, Sire ! ”

“ And do you not wish that I should send you back your credentials ? ”

Oh, how proudly she raised her head at the words !  
She, too, was a queen, and she proved it.

“ Sire, where I am once shown that my presence is unwelcome, I do not remain ! ”

It was an audacious speech, bordering on treason, and not the manner in which to address the Czar of All the Russias !

Springing from his chair, it was Araktseieff and not the melancholy monarch who hastened to reply to the haughty singer.

“ Are you aware, young lady, that there are duties from which a feeling of wounded pride does not exempt us ? To them belongs the respect due to the throne and ruler, to whom you owe your fame.”

Zeneida's bosom heaved ; her nostrils dilated like those of a zebra prepared for the fight with a wolf. Her great dark flashing eyes threatened to annihilate the favourite ; her lips quivered as if with fever.

“ Your Excellency,” she gasped, “ there are men who have carried gratitude to their benefactors to the other ends of the earth with them, and who, having had the misfortune to lose the favour of their august protectors, *have not gone home to sing the ‘Knife Song.’* ”

This was such a smart slap in the face to Araktseieff that he went back to his seat as though thinking it not worth his while to reply to the insinuation. Did she really know about it ? Had she her secret spies—perhaps Diabolka ? the gipsy girl could write now !

Instead of his silenced favourite, the Czar now took up the lance. It was but fair. If the squire defends his lord, surely his lord should defend the squire.

“ Your bitter remarks are in the wrong place, Fräulein Ilmarinen. If there is one man in Greater Russia who deserves to be looked upon as a perfect pattern of fidelity and loyalty, that is the man ! He who has been at my side in every battle ; has shared with me every danger, yet never claiming part in my glory ; who watches that I may sleep ; who defies

the world to defend me; who forsakes me never, when all else desert me;—that man is Araktsieff! What hard proofs of loyalty has he not withstood. How often have his enemies prevailed to banish him? And yet, as often as I have called, he has returned, without a word of reproach to me! I struck him a vital blow in exiling his son, yet he could kiss my hand, and say I had done right, and remain loyal to me. Such is Araktsieff!"

But the favourite could not glory in this imperial recognition of his services, for, as he resumed his seat, and, in order to mark his contemptuous indifference, opened the Sophien post-bag, the very letter Jakuskin had mentioned to Zeneida came to hand, and absorbed his attention to such a degree that he actually became deaf to the sound of his own praises from the lips of the Czar.

Zeneida saw how his face was working with demoniacal torture; how, convulsed by nameless horror, it had changed to the semblance of a maddened spectre, she saw his hair stand on end, his lips go blue, his eyes start from their sockets.

"Oh, woe is me!" he suddenly roared out, in a tone so brutalized, that the Czar turned round in affright. Araktsieff beat his breast with the letter, as a man tries to heal his wound with the hair of the dog that bit him—or of a scorpion with its dead body—then, springing up from his seat, "Oh, woe! oh, woe! that I came back! Why was I not there at the time?" And he flung out of the room like a madman.

The Czar, thinking that a sudden fit of mania had seized the favourite, endeavoured to hold him back.

"Alexis Andreovitch! What is the matter—where are you rushing?"

"Pardon, your Majesty; I must go back to Grusino."

"You will not leave me now? Affairs of State—the country?"

Zeneida, placing herself directly in front of

Araktseieff, with arms crossed on her breast, gave him one look.

That look sobered him for an instant. Compelling his countenance to resume its cold exterior, while the Czar laid his hand soothingly on his arm, his official self fought the real Araktseieff for the mastery. But this time the man conquered. Striking his forehead with the crushed letter still held in his hand, he burst out—

“What do I care for Russia? What do I care for all this miserable earth—for the Czar—for all the gods, when they could let such things happen? Oh, woe is me!”

And, pushing away the Czar’s hand, he rushed screaming from the room like one struck to death. The letter to the Czar he took with him.

“What can have come to the man?” exclaimed the Czar in amazement.

He had but now been investing him with virtues such as had never been possessed save by that one man, and here this very man suffers himself to indulge in so coarse and violent an outbreak, as would not be ventured upon before a petty prince, let alone a Russian Czar!

Was there some witchcraft in Zeneida’s gaze that could madden the soberest men, until, flinging down the seals of office at the feet of their sovereign, they should say—

“What is your country to me? What care I for you and your gods?”

The eyes of the Czar strove to read the secret from Zeneida’s face.

The artiste would have withdrawn.

“Stay!”

“If your Majesty commands, I will stay altogether, and not leave St. Petersburg.”

“Do you know what ails this man?”

“I do.”

“Then speak.”

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE TRAGI-COMEDY AT GRUSINO.

THE double wedding was to be celebrated. The whole of the tenantry had been commanded to attend. The courtyard of the castle had been thronged with wondering serfs from early dawn. Two couples—one handsome, the other loathsome—were to be married that day.

The preparations were on a magnificent scale. For three whole days the castle cooks had been engaged in making the national dishes. Long floral walks had been erected in the courtyard; the gateway had been converted into a triumphal arch by means of wreaths and coloured transparencies. In the centre of the great courtyard was a stage erected, covered with gay-hued carpets of goat's hair. Upon it stood a table bearing an image of the Virgin Mary; the covered plate in which were the wedding rings; a goblet; bread and salt;—in fine, everything required for the ceremony preceding the marriage service. For there is much to be gone through before a bridal couple reaches the Church portion of the ceremony—much to be gone through at the hands of the bystanders, the groomsmen, bridesmaids, and wedding-mother.

The wedding-mother has an important part to play. Until they arrive at the church doors, she is the principal personage.

Daimona is the wedding-mother in this instance.

She is marrying one of her serfs to her slave ; she is mother to both. The high-backed chair upon the tribune is for her. At first sound of the bells, the ceremony begins. From the priest's house the bridesmaids bring the bride in her bridal array. Diabolka's dress glistens with heavy gold embroidery ; a costly girdle encircles her slender waist, on her neck hangs a five-fold necklace of gold coins ; her head-dress is of precious stones. One might think she was a princess. From the opposite side resounds a horn, and the bridegroom, Schinko, is seen advancing with his supporters and groomsmen. His coal-black, curly hair falling on to his shoulders, betraying, despite the national costume, the bridegroom's Indian descent.

The groomsmen welcome the approaching bride with song, and follow the bridal pair to the altar. From out the stables the second couple are now brought. Wild screeches and the squeak of the bagpipes accompany them in their progress. The pomp of wedding garments only serve to make them more ridiculous. They are received with mocking rhymes, which seem to please them highly.

This couple is also placed at the table, so that bridegrooms and brides stand one at each corner.

At the second peal of bells the wedding-mother descends with her whole retinue from the castle. The retinue is composed of twelve female slaves, clad in white, who line the steps on either side. The wedding-mother mounts the tribune alone, and takes her seat upon the throne.

She is dressed like a queen ; and wears a purple mantle ; her cap of marten skin is embroidered with gold and pearls ; her face painted white and red. She begins the ceremony.

“ Schinko, what do you bring the bride for your wedding present ? ”

And Schinko details what he brings her—

“ Two gay-coloured beds, a cloak of Karassia cloth lined with fox, a breastplate with silver buttons, a

kokosnik set with pearls, two pair of red boots, an embroidered linen shirt, twelve zinc plates, a dish, and a gold embroidered head-dress and veil—if she behave well!"

All these gifts were brought round by the bridegroom's supporters, and severally shown to the guests.

The bride, on her side, gives the bridegroom: clothes, ornaments, household utensils, and last, a bundle of birch rods, "with which he is to chastise me when I do not behave well."

Now it is the turn of the second couple.

"Well, Polyka, and what do you bring your bridegroom?"

But this well-assorted couple are not content that one should speak before the other; one interrupts the other, and they sputter out—

"I, a ragged cloak."

"I, a pot with a hole in it."

"I, a footless stocking in which ten cats could not catch one mouse."

"I, an empty jug that once had brandy in it."

"I, a bed sacking, with no blankets, and that lacks feathers."

The wedding guests laughed themselves ill over this dialogue of the bridal couple.

"And then twelve pair of 'dubina,'" shouted the bridegroom, with a loud laugh.

"With two ends to them," returned the bride, with a giggle.

The word "dubina," so soft sounding in Russian, signifies in the barbaric English tongue—stick!

"Now, exchange rings," says Daimona to the couples. "They are in this covered plate. Those of the one couple are of gold and silver; the gold one is the bride's; the silver, the bridegroom's. The rings of the second couple are of copper and lead. Let each take his own ring."

The wedding-mother, removing the silken cover from the plate, signed to Diabolka to set the example.

Diabolka taking the gold and silver ring placed the gold one on her own finger, and was handing the silver one to Schinko.

Daimona seized Diabolka's hand.

"Not so! You will give the silver ring to Vuk; and Schinko the copper one to Polyka. *For your bridegroom is Vuk; and Schinko's bride is Polyka.* That is the arrangement."

A burst of loud laughter followed upon these words. Now there would be some real fun. Diabolka and Vuk, Polyka and Schinko. The wedding-mother had the right to marry her serfs as she chose. Her serfs belonged to her, hand and foot, as did her horses and her asses. She can pair her serfs as she chooses.

The laughter of the assembled guests grew louder as the two monsters, at Daimona's words, threw themselves on the handsome prey given over to them.

Their laughter was only stopped when Diabolka, before them all, gave Vuk such a blow on the chest with both hands that he slipped off the table, and, rolling from the tribune, fell amongst the people.

Things were, indeed, going badly!

Daimona, springing towards the table like a fury, struck her fist violently upon it. At that sound the spectators' laughter suddenly ceased. The grin was still on their faces, but every sound died away on their laughing lips.

It was fun no longer.

"You will not take the husband I have chosen for you?" shrieked Daimona in fury.

"No," returned the girl, stamping her foot, "no!"

"Dog—gipsy devil! You dare to oppose me—me who raised you from a dung-heap!"

"Then let me go back to the dung-heap."

"So you shall! If you will not have the bridegroom I have given you, then take off the bridal dress I gave you, and be off in the gipsy rags you

came in. But they want something to complete them—the addition of a thrashing for your audacity Schinko! Here!"

He himself, her elder brother, her lover, her bridegroom!

Schinko was wearing, as bridegroom, the symbol of his office hanging from his girdle—the short-handled whip. At his mistress's command, he raised the whip.

"Strike!" ordered Daimonia.

The girl, white with fear, held her face between her hands.

"Brother! can you strike me?"

She had even got so far as to fear the lash. Or was it the thought that it was Schinko's hand which was to strike that made her shrink back? The gipsy's heart was not hard enough to let him strike the blow. He threw the whip away.

"Dog, pick up that whip! or shall I have you and her tied together to the tail of a wild horse? Go on! Slash away until I say enough; fifty lashes for me, fifty for Junker Araktseieff."

Schinko picked up the whip.

Despairing, the girl, flinging herself at Daimona's feet, clasped her knees, and sobbing, implored for mercy.

"Ah, you abomination, that's the place for you!" cried Daimona through her clenched teeth; and seizing the girl at her feet by her long plaits, she shrieked to Schinko, "Now, have at her!"

With one spring, the gipsy, like a panther, was upon them, and seizing Daimona by the throat with his left hand, with his right he whipped out his dagger. Terrified, Daimona released her hold of Diabolka, and defended herself with one arm; the serf's dagger had pierced her shoulder, the blood spouted high from it.

"Hi! varlets! seize him! help!" stormed the woman.

But not a person stirred among the crowd.

Daimona saw that she was left to herself. Being a powerful woman, who knew how to fight, she freed herself from the gipsy's grasp, pushed him from her, sprang off the tribune, and rushed towards the castle steps, Schinko in pursuit.

Nor did a hand stir to hinder the serf. The crowd, the whole body of servants, looked on, and saw Schinko dash after the mistress and wound her afresh. The woman, turning upon him, began to wrestle with her pursuer; his dagger was plunged again and again into her breast. Once more she succeeded in pushing back her adversary, and darting into the midst of her women servants, shouted, "Help! protect me!" The women put their hands to their ears that they might not hear her cries. They all hated her. Then she was seen flying down the long corridor, screaming and shrieking, her murderer close upon her heels. Still no one went to the rescue.

At the extreme end of the corridor was the picture of a saint. Thither she fled, and fell down before it in beseeching attitude. But the saint did not stir a hand to protect her. Then rushing to the parapet of the balcony, she attempted in vain to spring from it.

In an instant the murderer was upon her, and before the eyes of the assembled crowd Schinko flung the mistress of Grusino to the depths below. Daimona was dead!

The murderer slowly comes down the stone steps into the courtyard. A path is made for him. He ascends the bridal tribune. There, her face to the ground, lies a girl motionless with terror, shame, and despair. Close to her, the wedding garments. The murderer wipes the blood off his dagger with the bridal veil, and, taking the girl by the hand, raises her to her feet. They look each other in the eyes. One look, like a couple of wild wolves. No need for speech! Then off they run, hand in hand, into the steppe, into the woods—anywhere. No one seeks to hold them back. They were never seen again!

Who would attempt to find two wolves escaped from captivity, in their native lair, amid the dwellers of the endless steppes, whether in forest or jungle? Only once did the two call a halt, when Diabolka, having reached her gipsy encampment, wrote the letter to Jakuskin, in which she related the tragicomedy of Grusino, a copy of which letter fell into the hands of the Czar's favourite, acquainting him with the horrors that had taken place. The household at Grusino had not had the courage to give him the tidings.

Zeneida acted wisely in having personally related the events to the Czar; for those who later informed him of what had occurred at Grusino, made a point of causing it to appear that this murder was in connection with St. Petersburg secret societies. Many were set upon finding the motive for the deed in high circles, where it was a matter of interest to keep the favourite from the person of the Czar, and where it was hoped, by the banishment of the son, to have effected a rupture of the close bond uniting Czar and favourite. According to some Schinko and Diabolka were hired by the conspirators.

Was there any truth in this? No one has ever cleared up the mystery. But whatever hand had prepared the blow, it had struck home.

Araktsieff was to be seen tearing through the streets of St. Petersburg, hatless, with hair wildly streaming. Your orthodox Russian, when he mourns, goes in sun and snow with head uncovered.

On the day of his flight, two great waggon-loads of state papers were despatched from the favourite's palace to the Hermitage. His orders, his sword, his keys of office, he sent by his house-porter to the Lord Chamberlain. And, at the moment of his departure, the thunder of "Holy Christopher" startled the inhabitants of St. Petersburg out of their rest. This father among cannons is only fired when a general dies. The court-favourite had himself gone to the commandant of the fortress and ordered the

cannon to be fired. The commandant had no choice but to obey. Araktseieff was commander-in-chief of the artillery. When the firing was over the commandant asked—

“What was the name of the deceased general?”

“Alexis Andreovitch Araktseieff!”

Some days later the Czar had terrible news of Araktseieff. His reason had entirely left him.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE HERMIT.

ONLY when Araktseiff had left the Czar did the emperor realize how completely alone he was in the world.

There was not a man in whom he could place confidence; in every one he saw an enemy, a conspirator; and his true friends, if he still possessed any, he had embittered by Araktseiff's recall. His generals were disaffected by his not supporting the Greeks. Secret treaties were directed against him. Those who were already apprised of his declaration of war, and had sufficient energy to act counter to him, had left the field at the beginning of operations.

On Araktseiff's return to Grusino, he had hurried without delay to the mausoleum, and, barring the door behind him, had cast himself down beside Daimona's coffin, and for two whole days nothing was heard within but his bitter sobs. He would eat nothing, would make no answer to words or entreaties. "Daimona" was the only sound he uttered.

He had loved that woman as only giant beasts love their mates; when the hunter has shot the female he may shoot the male, for it will not leave its dead. For two whole days Araktseiff's household in vain besieged the door of the mausoleum; Chevalier Galban's representations also that he should come out and take care of his valuable life, were fruitless; he paid no heed to his faithful followers. In vain they called him their "dear, good master,"

their "sweet friend Alexis Andreovitch," he was deaf to their voices.

On the third day Photios, the Archimandrite of the Monastery of St. George, came to the mausoleum. He is the holy man, to receive whose blessing hundreds of thousands make the yearly pilgrimage to the monastery from all parts of Russia. The decree of the saint is as much esteemed as is a papal bull.

When Czar Alexander I. gave into the hands of Prince Galitzin, the freethinker, the portfolio of Public Instruction, the Archimandrite, going up to the Czar, exclaimed threateningly—

"If you take the ancient faith from your people, you will shake your empire to its foundations."

Whereupon the Czar dismissed Prince Galitzin; and the education of the people was left in the hands of the Sacred Synod. Russians always have their "living saints," some of whom work miracles.

Photios, standing at the door of the mausoleum, called to Araktseieff within, in language unmistakably plain.

"Abandoned criminal, come out!"

The cries within were silenced.

"Come out from there!"

Araktseieff staggered out. He was scarcely recognizable. His beard, untouched for several days, stood out in grey bristles round his face; his eyes were bloodshot with weeping; his lips swollen; his hair lay wildly matted on his forehead; his general's uniform was streaked with green mould.

"What seek you in that grave?"

"Death."

"Of course you will die; we all shall do so, as penalty for our sins. But do you desire to crown your evil deeds by dying unrepentant? Do you desire to die beside the coffin of her for the loss of whose soul you are guilty? You were the cause of her sin; will you drag her down to hell? Instead of thinking of repentance, would you follow her to condemnation? Defiantly would you burst the

barriers of that fearful next world, instead of entreating admission with bended head? Of course you will die, but not when it pleases you; rather when it pleases your Maker to grant you death as a reward for penance."

"Your place is in the deep catacombs," continued Photios; "not by the side of your concubine. Under the rays of the burning sun, in storm, in the roar of the tempest, under drenching rain, shall you seek repentance! Stand up, follow me!"

Araktseieff crawled towards him on his knees.

"Now eat!" commanded Photios, throwing him a couple of turnips.

Picking them up, Araktseicff obeyed.

"Now put on these!" And he threw a dilapidated monk's dress towards him, faded out of all colour by sun and rain. Araktseieff, taking off his general's uniform, put it on. And as saints, on this earth, do not drive in carriages, he followed the saint, barefooted, to the gates of the Monastery of St. George.

St. George's is one of the wealthiest monasteries in all Russia. It is situated near Grusino, at the end of the long peninsula formed by the river Volkhoff, and Lake Ilmer. Its gilded cupolas, green from the verdigris which centuries have brought out on the copper, tend to spread its fame far and wide. But entrance within the walls of the monastery oppresses the beholder. Silver dais upon silver dais reach to the dome; the organ towers aloft, with its pipes of gold; there are pictures of saints, dazzling with rubies; mosaics composed entirely of precious stones. Upon the elaborately decorated altars lie costly Bibles, bound in silver; and enamelled books of the Mass. Over one of the altars is a picture of St. George, in beaten silver. But it is only when we come to the "treasure chamber," with its priceless store of mitres, crooks, crowns, pearl-embroidered stoles, golden monstrances, that we realize how rich is Heaven's vicegerent—the Church. While the priests, who guard

all these treasures, wander in among them in coarse cassocks, and bare feet, that the world may see how poor is man.

But the most jealously guarded of all the treasures stood before the altar. It was a granite pillar, enclosed within silver rails.

On the granite was engraven: "Upon this spot knelt Czar Alexander, attended by his faithful servants, the Archimandrite Photios, and Alexis Andreovitch Araktsieff, in the year 1818."

Thither Photios brought the statesman, that he might see his name perpetuated beside that of the Czar.

"So high you had raised yourself. Now come and see how low you have sunk!"

The Archimandrite led the penitent back to the cloister, and showed him his, the Archimandrite's cell. It was a space six feet broad by eight feet long. But there was one luxury in it: it had a window, through which sunshine penetrated. The bed was a coffin, roughly put together; the *priedieu* a stone, hollowed out by constant kneeling; a jug and a bowl for the daily food, the sole furniture of the cell. Yet all this was luxury compared with what awaited the penitent.

In the catacombs of the cloister were caves hewn out of solid rock, just large enough to contain a man kneeling or recumbent; a small hole in the heavy, iron door let in air. Total darkness reigned. Some of these caves were inhabited by whilom, powerful noblemen, masters over hundreds of thousands of serfs, now no longer masters of their own souls. It is not tyranny, not the power of the sacred hierarchy which holds them bound here, but their own blind zeal. Despising, hating the world, they are self-condemned to this awful imprisonment. The catacombs of the cloisters of St. George and of Solowetshk harbour many thus voluntarily seeking a living death.

The notion pleased Araktsieff.

Lying upon his straw, he passed days and weeks.

His door was kept locked by day, only to be opened at sound of the vesper bell, when he went to seek food, for food is not brought to penitents. Only at dusk may they steal into the cloister garden to search for mangel wurzel, samphire, potatoes, and such-like produce of the earth, their sole sustenance. One day Araktseieff came across a still more remarkable penitent than himself.

He, too, had once been a distinguished bojar; but none knew what his real name was. Here he was only known as "Little Father Nahum."

Nahum did not even allow himself the luxury of a ragged cassock. His sole covering is a rush mat woven by himself, his white hair and grey beard flow wildly down over his dirt-begrimed limbs. Nahum does not allow himself a lodging in a cave. In summer he sleeps in pools, in winter he creeps into a dung-heap. To kneel day after day in his cave is not humiliation enough for him; he prostrates himself across the threshold of the church door, that those who enter may walk over him, kick him, spit on him. To gather fresh roots out of the earth and eat them, is looked upon by Little Father Nahum as sinful gluttony. He seeks his evening meal from the dust-heap; what is thrown there is his sustenance.

Araktseieff had been doing penance three weeks in the catacombs when, one evening, as he was returning with a bundle of leeks in his hand, he came upon Nahum feasting off his self-laid dinner table.

"Ah," said Little Father Nahum, accosting the newcomer, "I have found so much to eat here to-night I can share with a friend."

"What has Providence provided for you?"

"Mouldy cheese."

"All right. Give me some."

"Here it is. Take it all," returned Nahum. "He who hankers after a penitent's food should have it all given up to him."

And he handed him the mouldy cheese, with the paper in which it had been wrapped and thrown

upon the dust-heap. Truly, loathsome food ! But Araktseieff's attention was not so much arrested by the contents as by the paper in which the cheese was folded. It was a letter, and in it Araktseieff at once recognized the handwriting of the Czar. His blood surged within him. The Czar's writing a cover for stale cheese ! And then the contents ! It was a letter addressed to Photios.

"Call him to you. Speak to him in the name of holy religion ; strengthen him in the faith. Admonish him to preserve his life for the good of his country, which is beyond all other considerations. Thus will you preserve to the empire a servant of inestimable loyalty, and to me, a faithful friend whom I sincerely honour and esteem."

And this was the paper chosen as a cover for mouldy cheese, and thrown upon a dust-heap !

"Well, eat away, man," murmured Little Father Nahum ; and taking up the cheese which Araktseieff had let fall, offered it to him in the flat of his dirty hand.

Thrusting his fellow-penitent aside, Araktseieff hastened to Photios.

Photios was in the act of reading vespers. Araktseieff did not suffer him to come to an end.

"Was this letter from the Czar addressed to you ?"

"To me."

"And you threw it on a dust-heap ?"

"That you might find it there."

"I have found it. My penance is over. I return to St. Petersburg."

"Just what I wished to accomplish."

"You have accomplished it. But you do not yet know, what you are doing when you bring Alexis Araktseieff forth from the grave ? You constrain him back to life and the world, once more to prove the stuff that is in him. Well may you tremble before a resuscitated Araktseieff !"

"A blessing be upon all your actions !" stammered the Archimandrite, and continued his vespers.

Araktseieff left the monastery that very hour. He left it with the same wild frenzy of destruction with which he had entered it, only that then his desire was for self-destruction, now had returned the old desire for the destruction of others.

When Araktseieff, after those three weeks, was seen again in St. Petersburg, every one started back in terror at his appearance. His face was emaciated, his hair had gone quite white. It was plain to see that he had risen from the grave.

## CHAPTER XL.

### DISCORDS.

ZENEIDA was strolling alone through the shady winding paths of her park in the twilight of evening. Nightingales were singing ; from a pond close by came the sound of croaking frogs ; ever and anon the song of a boatman on the Neva broke the stillness, or the distant sound of a violin or clarinet in an inn, or the howl of a chained-up dog. Then would come the tones of the passing bell, or from the vicinity of Monplaisir a sharp "Halt! Who goes there?" sometimes followed by a shot. Then again the song of nightingales, the croak of frogs, the sound of clarinet and the toll of passing bell. These discordant notes found an answering echo in Zeneida's heart.

Araktseieff's second return was hurrying on the crisis. No sooner had the Czar passed over the cares of government to his favourite's shoulders than he had secluded himself completely in the solitude of Monplaisir. Just as he had formerly avoided his consort, so now did he devote himself exclusively to her. He seemed as if he could not live an hour without her, as though he were endeavouring to atone by devotion for his fourteen years of neglect. Now first he recognised the treasure he possessed and had neglected ; now first he perceived that the wife he loved was ill, that her protracted sorrows, her secret grief, had undermined her strength. And he trembled to think he might lose her.

But the Czarina was happy. She blessed the

sickness which had given her back her husband. The Czarina's physician, Dr. Stoffrigen, had recommended a milder climate for her through the severity of winter; perhaps that of Venice, but Elisabeth had answered, "A Russian empress should not die anywhere else than on Russian soil." And it was this thought alone which absorbed the soul of the Czar.

Of the devastations wrought by Araktseieff, armed as he was with unfettered power, none told the Czar. Of all that was passing on the other side of the poplars of Monplaisir he was ignorant. He was not informed that Araktseieff's first step was to have the entire household of Grusino, who had been witnesses to the murder, consisting of ten men and twelve maid-servants, brought to St. Petersburg to the pillory, and lashed almost to death, for not having gone to Daimona's rescue. He was ignorant that the severity previously practised as a system was now, by Araktseieff's thirst for vengeance, increased to gross cruelty; that high officials of every kind had been dismissed from their posts without reason; that the dungeons were filling on mere suspicion; that the poor Finns were being cruelly oppressed. Possessing nothing that he could take away, he punished them through that which he "gave," his latest edict being that the toasts at public dinners must be given in Russian. All this had strained disaffection and discontent to its utmost limit. But of these things Alexander knew nothing. No. He was absorbed in devising how to procure fresh air without draught in his beloved patient's room; how to keep out the gnats; and, among the flowers for her apartment, how to select those that would not give her a headache.

And Zeneida well knows what is looming in the distance. Secret societies no longer hold meetings; they are agreed what is to be done. The only question now is—"When?"

The outbreak must be general throughout the empire. The threads are in Zeneida's hands. The artiste has retired from the stage. Moreover, the

opera is closed during the summer months in St. Petersburg ; and she will not again appear as a member of the Imperial Opera Company, but will give a concert for a charitable purpose in the course of the autumn. The day was to be publicly advertised in official papers ten days previously. When the announcement therefore appeared that Fräulein Ilmarinen would sing for the benefit of the Orphanage on such and such a date, the conspirators would know that this was the day fixed for the rebellion. The Government organ would itself spread the word throughout the empire. Thus in her hand are the shears which shall sever the fatal thread ; and the grave foreknowledge of all that such severance must bring with it is oppressing her spirit. The rebellion is unavoidable ; no one will longer bear the heavy burden ; from ragged mujik to titled magnate, all are yearning to burst the yoke, and the Kalevains have more reason to weep than their fellows. But, what is to happen to the imperial pair in the outbreak ? Both had been such kind protectors to Zeneida. The palace had been a home to her. How will it be possible to save their lives without proving a traitor to the cause ?

And then a second trouble—Pushkin. True, he had promised her he would withdraw his name from the “green book ;” but, when giving the promise, he had thought he would have the daughter of the Czar to wife. That is over now, and Pushkin has no further reason to withdraw from the Northern Union. He, too, is in possession of the conspirators’ plans ; there is not a doubt but that as soon as he reads the announcement that Zeneida will sing for the benefit of the orphanage, he will appear that day in St. Petersburg, even must he leave Paradise itself to be there.

How is she to hinder this without casting the slur of cowardice upon Pushkin ? The delights of love alone would not be strong enough to hold him back—a yet stronger motive must be found. And she paces to and fro under the trees in the dusk ; in her soul

reign the same discords which disturb the brilliant night, and she seeks in vain some quieting thought.

The Czar has grown melancholy ; the Czarina is sick unto death ; they live but for each other ; have shut themselves up from the world. Their example is contagious. Even Prince Ghedimin has become reconciled to his wife, and no longer visits Zeneida. St. Petersburg society has scattered itself among the forty islands of the Neva. Every one lives to himself ; all social life is extinct. Every visitor is looked upon suspiciously by the host as one of Araktsieff's spies. There is an oppressive calm over everything. People do not even write to each other any more. They tremble at the black inquisition.

Pushkin gives no news of himself. He sits at home in his desert at Pleskov. If he keeps silent about his happiness, he has a hundred good reasons for that silence. It is possible that Bethsaba has written more than once to Zeneida ; but letters are an uncertain medium of communication. Who knows into whose hands they may fall ?

This great calm, this isolation, this striving to keep up courage, began to be oppressive. Chevalier Galban received orders to go from villa to villa, and organize amusements among the aristocracy. Husbands were no longer to be tied to their wives' apron-strings.

It was rumoured that the lovely Princess Ghedimin would break the ice, and bring society together again by means of a great reception on the day of the Feast of Masinka ; and that in order to make the reconciliation of the Prince and Princess more publicly known, Zeneida would be included among the Princess's invited guests.

The haughty Princess sending an invitation to the equally haughty Queen of Song, whom the world credited with having been one of the Prince's flames ! It is hard to say which woman has the greater courage, the one who sends, or the one who accepts, the invitation.

But Korynthia has made a still more difficult

decision. She means to send Bethsaba an invitation, accompanied by a coaxing, forgiving, affectionate letter, written by her own hand. And in order to ensure the young wife's acceptance, the Princess intends to offer the prospect of the imperial pardon. Bethsaba shall have the opportunity of soliciting forgiveness from the Czar for her own bold step, and the return of imperial favour towards her husband, banished by the Czar's displeasure to Pleskow. This bait would be irresistible.

All this had Zeneida gathered from Chevalier Galban.

What did Korynthia hope to achieve by this? What her aim in getting hold of Bethsaba?

It seemed next to impossible that the young wife should be tempted to leave her home during her honeymoon, and without her husband, who may not stir beyond the precincts of his estate. Yet, if it were possible, what would be the consequences?

Zeneida thought she had found in the person of Bethsaba the missing link in the chain. Now it is her work to fit that link in its place.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### HOW TO ROB A MAN OF HIS WIFE.

IT must be a poor toy that cannot amuse children. And can there be greater children than a newly married couple who ~~are~~ are deeply in love with each other?

There is kite-flying in the park at Pleskow, and Bethsaba is in high glee at her kite always flying straight up and remaining aloft, whilst Alexander's is always coming to grief. Her kite, too, is much handsomer than his. In the form of a dragon, it has two large eyes, a mouth, nose, and movable ears; whilst Alexander's is just a commonplace thing made out of old scraps of manuscripts pasted together. The wide expanse affords the two grown-up children room enough to run with their kites. No eyes to see them but those of the stag on the edge of the forest.

A post-chaise rolls quickly along the highway skirting the park walls; the postilion blows his horn cheerily.

"I think that post-chaise must have stopped at our gate," observes Bethsaba.

"So it has. It means either a guest or a letter."

"Oh, I hope no guest," sighed the little wife.

Newly married people are not hospitable as a rule. Still, somebody appeared to have come. The dvornik approached them from the castle. They hastily lowered their kites; they must not be caught at such childish amusements. In the hurry the dragon

caught in the withered bough of a pine-tree, and lost one eye.

"What a pity!" murmured Bethsaba, in vexation. "Now my dragon has only got one eye. Have you a scrap of paper about you to repair the damage?"

"Where should I get it from? Haven't you already seized upon every vestige of paper to make your dragon with?"

"Do look! Perhaps you'll find some old bill or other."

Meanwhile the dvornik had come up to them.

"Well, Tanaschi, what is it?"

"A letter."

"To whom?"

Bethsaba seized the letter from the dvornik.

"Oh, oh! A woman's handwriting! Take it. A love-letter. Some former flame writing to reproach you. Read it. Of course it is to make an appointment."

"You are right enough. It is a woman's handwriting, but addressed to you, not to me, my dear."

"To me?" cried Bethsaba, in surprise. "Who can have written to me? Perhaps Zeneida?"

"No, it's not Zeneida. I know her handwriting."

"Perhaps too well! But who else could have written to me?"

And they began guessing who the writer could have been, while the letter passed from one to another. At last Alexander proposed that the best way to see who had written the letter would be to open it.

As they saw the signature, both simultaneously cried, "My godmother!" "Your godmother!"

"What can she have written about?"

Presently, as if it were intended for a joke, Bethsaba laughed heartily over the letter.

"Ha, ha, ha! She wants me to go to the Masinka Fête! Alone! Without Alexander! It is to be a grand affair; the Czar and Czarina and several foreign princes will be there—I shall have opportunity to

entreat the Czar to grant Alexander permission to go back to St. Petersburg! Ha, ha, ha! Did you hear that, Alexander Sergievitch? My godmother sends me an invitation to a ball without you! The letter could not have come at a more opportune moment—I just wanted it!"

And with these words, she seized the precious epistle; it just covered the damage the dragon had sustained, and a couple of pins fixed it in place—the black seal forming the pupil of the eye. (The Court had gone into mourning for six weeks after Sophie's death; and society used black sealing-wax during that period.)

"A large case also arrived by post-chaise," said the dvornik.

"Put it on one side. I have no time now to look at it."

What more incomprehensible than that one of the fair sex should have no time to look at a ball-dress, sent direct from the capital? The dragon was mended; and ready now to resume its flight in the air.

Laughing and shouting like a child, Bethsaba ran along with the tail of her kite dragging after her; the second child stood looking on, laughing, while the dragon disapprovingly wagged its foolish-looking head. While starting a kite, the flyer has to run back with head turned upwards. Bethsaba therefore was not aware that she was running directly against some one coming towards her from the English garden; and was startled to find herself suddenly embraced from behind, and a long kiss impressed upon her face. Then she gave a loud joyous cry, and the next instant her arms were round the intruder's neck; and not content with hanging upon that neck, she pulled its owner on to the grass, and rolling over, kissed her enthusiastically, interposing the most endearing epithets, "you love—you darling—you precious!" Pushkin was fain to go to the rescue, and help them both up again.

It needed no extraordinary acumen to guess who was the visitor so affectionately welcomed.

"Do not quite strangle me, you little goose!" exclaimed Zeneida. "Look; your dragon has meanwhile flown away."

"Let it fly out into the wide world, and my godmother's letter with it. Do you know, I have had a letter from my godmother? Do you know, she has invited me to the Masinka Fête, without Alexander? Do you know what I did with her letter? My dragon had a slit, and I mended the slit with it. How dear and good of you to come and see us!"

"It is the correct thing. Six weeks after marriage it is the wedding-mother's duty to come and look after the young couple, and see that they are happy together—and if they really care for each other. Has your husband beaten you yet?"

"Oh, dreadfully," replied Bethsaba, pretending to complain. "The last time it was here!" and she secretly rubbed a place on her arm until she had made it red; but a redness Zeneida detected which had come from no blows.

"And you, Pushkin, have you been writing many fine verses?"

"Not a line! You know my muse is never active in fine weather. It requires storm, rain, and snow."

"And your sky has remained sunny?"

"As you see. I have not written a word."

This was very possible. There are times in his life when a poet only feels poetry, does not write it.

"Why, we have not a sheet of paper in the house," said Bethsaba, her woman's instinct whispering that it is the highest boast when a poet's wife can say that it has been through her that the poet has been faithless to his muse. "We really have not. I had to use my godmother's letter to make my dragon's eye."

"Indeed! Is that how you treat your correspondence? That is a good thing to know. I will never write to you then, but when I have anything to tell you will come myself to tell it."

"That will be nice."

"Or you will come to me."

To this the same response, "That will be nice," did not follow. Clinging to Alexander's arm she looked up to him, saying—

"You will not let me go, will you?"

Zeneida answered for him—

"As to that we shall not ask Alexander Sergievitch. His business it is when his little wife wants to go visiting, to order out the carriage and horses, and to take care of the house in her absence."

"But I could not go anywhere, if I wished it. Do you not see how I am dressed? It is the Pleskow costume! Alexander tells me it was also the costume of the first Russian Christian, Princess Olga. And I like it so much. Admire this sarafan with its many buttons, the pearl embroidered cap on my head, my red boots and striped silk stockings!" And with childish *naivete* she lifted up her dress to her knees. "How people would stare, if I were to appear among them in this costume! I have no other dress, this is what pleases my Alexander to see me in!"

She told the truth. The ball dresses sent her were not her own property yet; she had not accepted the present.

Alexander drew his little nestling wife closer to him.

"We have become thorough peasant farmers."

"Heaven grant that you may remain so," thought Zeneida to herself. "I fear, however, that some day you will be leaving wife and village, and it will no longer be the pearl embroidered cap upon your wife's head you will then consider the greatest adornment; but the Phrygian cap you will be running after!"

That which Dante omitted among the tortures of hell was that a woman should be condemned to see the man she loves, who might have been hers, revelling in the love of another woman and she his wife. Had

Zeneida's love been that of ordinary women, it would have mattered little to her that the man, round whom her fetters had been cast, should, sooner or later, be dragged by these very fetters to the grave. The joys of the present would have outweighed the tortures of the future, the dread secrets of eternity. But so dearly had she loved Pushkin, that she sought for him a happiness in which she had no part. It was an unnatural situation ; and one requiring a nobler courage than most possess. But is not the woman who devotes herself to play a part in politics an unnatural, abnormal creation ? Upon the altar of politics the heart is the lamb of sacrifice. In the service of a Moloch sensual passion may exist, but not love. Those who become political leaders have no longer father or mother, brother or sister, lover or friend ; they recognize no difference between honesty and roguery, between the laws of God and the expediencies of man. Hence the pursuit of politics is an unnatural occupation for women, with whom love and justice are ruling principles. The Amazon who went forth to war had first rooted out the gentler feelings.

But truly no Amazon ever carried her self-torture to finer point than did this woman who, by forcing herself to come as guest to this house, was witness of the happiness denied to her, and voluntarily given to another. Indeed, she had come to guard that very happiness against the storms of the future. Oh, this Moloch !

" Listen, child, my sole object in coming was to steal you away from Alexander Sergievitch for a time."

" Ah ! If you want to steal either, take both of us. Alexander would not mind being run off with by you."

" Only, as it happens, he is neither invited, nor may he come. You must accept your godmother's invitation."

" What ? The invitation to her ball ?"

" There you will meet the Czar and Czarina, they will speak to you."

“I—there—without Alexander?”

“Upon you Pushkin’s freedom depends. Your marriage with him has entirely marred his career. He does not feel it now, but in the course of a year or two he will remember that formerly every step he took was accompanied by the clank of spurs. The soul of a man is not to be confined in a cage, like a tame bird, especially when he has eagle’s wings. Be it your task to implore forgiveness from the Czar for your husband, that Pushkin may proceed on his interrupted career. Now the meadows are still green; in another month they will be covered with snow, and the couple condemned to fireside and indoor life, will not be so light-hearted as the one flying their kites in the open meadow.”

“Then it is your wish that I should intercede for Alexander’s return to St. Petersburg?”

“Not for all the world! No, a thousand times rather entreat the Czar to give him a mission that shall take you and him to your own people and country. Describe to the Czar and Czarina the land in which you were born, as it lives in your memory with its genial climate, its aromatic woods, its fruit-bearing trees. Tell them all the lovely and beautiful things of it that your memory can recall, and entreat the Czar as an act of mercy to yourself, to send your husband there.”

“Oh, the tempting thought!” sighed Bethsaba. “But he will never consent that I should leave him and go away, and stay days and weeks away from him.”

“It would only be one week.”

“But that is a century! Oh no! Alexander would never consent to it.”

“You leave that to me; I will talk him over.”

“Oh, if you succeed in that, you will be a real fairy. But what an odd fairy! Had you wanted to carry off Alexander from me, I could have understood it; but me from Alexander—that I cannot understand.”

"See, here he comes through the garden. Place yourself here at the window and watch. I will go and meet him. You listen, how I am going to bewitch him!"

"That I am curious to hear."

One intrenchment was already taken. Zeneida hastened to storm the second.

Pushkin crossing the lawn, was astonished to see Zeneida hurrying towards him.

"Turn back, and let us have a little talk," said she, putting her hand on Pushkin's arm. "Are you quite happy?"

"One can never be too happy."

"My object in coming is to ask you to spare me a portion of your happiness. I want to run away with your wife for a week."

"My little wife! What to do with her? Already she loves you ever so much better than she does me."

"Do not fear. She loves you above everything in heaven and earth, and all that lies between them. She positively must accept the invitation to Princess Ghedimin's ball."

The girl wife, watching at her window, sees how her husband vehemently draws away his arm from Zeneida's retaining hand. Zeneida does not shrink; she takes possession of his arm again.

"Hot head! She will not be staying with the Princess, but with me; I will be her chaperone. Since I gave up the stage my house has become strictly proper; I have held no more frivolous gatherings; since the Szojusz Blagadenstoiga made its final decision, I have had no more conspirators coming near me; no need for masquerades or riotous meetings, I live a quiet, secluded life. The Czar has sent me the Order of the Cross as compensation for my recent dismissal; and, *noblesse oblige*, the bestarred Zeneida no longer consorts with Diabolkas. So have you not the courage to trust your wife to me, if I keep vigilant watch over her?"

"But to what purpose? If you want to beg some favour of the Czar for me, you little know me!"

The woman at the window saw Pushkin fiercely slash off the heads of the asters at his feet.

"I know you perfectly well. You have made up your mind to stay on here, at Pleskow, see the grass grow, hunt hares, shoot wild duck, smoke the house out, play *ombre*, and discourse of dogs and horses. It will be your ambition to keep a good cellar, to be known as a good dancer, to occasionally slash an officer or two in duels, and to leave your papers and periodicals uncut. You would have just strength and energy for such a life! But there are others interested in your wife's coming."

"Who?"

"First the Szojusz Blagadenstoiga; then the Czar."

"At my little Bethsi's coming?"

"Do not interrupt me; I must speak quickly. You are aware that this second return of Araktsceiff has made it impossible to stave off rebellion. His violent measures have had so embittering an effect, that no one any longer attempts to defend the life of the Czar, save I alone. Perhaps because I am a woman —yet there have been illustrious examples enough to show that women can be as cruel in the matter of blood-shedding as men, and even in a more cold and calculating fashion. An outbreak initiated by Kubusoff's air-guns, or Kakhowsky's infernal-machine, or, as Jakuskin has planned, by an opportune ball, giving the signal for attack upon the entire imperial family, would have no beneficial result. It would simply bring about the overthrow of the empire, the war of the knife and the axe *versus* bayonet, the war of rags *versus* gold lace, inaugurating a reign of chaos which would make the country bless the return of despotism, and welcome a peace, even though accompanied by their old fetters. Now, the Czar and Czarina must not be hurt! This reason, not sentiment, dictates.

"My plan is as follows: the Czarina's physician

has advised her being taken to a milder climate. But Her Majesty will not hear of leaving the Russian dominions, and the Caucasus she looks upon as a wilderness in which it is impossible to live. She gives no heed to the naturalists who describe the country, saying they are mere flattering official reporters. But if a young, unsophisticated little bride, presenting herself to the imperial pair, were to petition as a special favour to be allowed to go back with her husband to her beautiful native land, describing this native land with all the enthusiasm of early and tender recollection, it is possible that, though this request may be refused, yet the Czarina herself might be attracted to the idea of going to that lovely land. The Czar worships his consort to such a degree, that he would accompany and stay with her there; with this result, that those who want to inaugurate the outbreak with the violent death of the Czar would be constrained to devise some other nobler, more humane, more politic, plan of action. On the Black Sea the Czar will live his life without cares; here we should have the imperious favourite only to bring to judgment. The constitution would be proclaimed in St. Petersburg without blood-shedding; the army would declare in its favour; and Czar Alexander would be free to choose either to fulfil the unanimous wish of his people, and come back as their beloved monarch, or, if he prefer it, to embark on board a ship in the Black Sea, and sail away to seek the hospitality of—say—the Sultan of Turkey, if he wish it. Any-way, his life would be preserved."

The young wife at the window sees her husband kiss the hand of his guest. He is won over already. Zenejda has succeeded in carrying off the wife from the husband.

"Those whom you love are loved indeed, even when they are tyrants!" said Pushkin, deeply moved.

"It is the holy cause, not the Czar, I wish to save!"

"Both! Come, I will trust my wife to you! Take

her with you ! Let her, with her lark's song, bid the storm to cease ! ”

Bethsaba standing at the window sees her husband and Zeneida come quickly back to her. “ Truly you are an enchantress ! ” she thinks.

Pushkin comes in to his wife.

“ Only think ! your kite has been brought back from the far end of the town ! Here is your god-mother's letter, as kind as can be. You must do as she wishes. How could you refuse an invitation so worded ? especially as Zeneida undertakes to be your chaperone.”

Bethsaba looked at each in amazement, and then raising a threatening finger shook it at Zeneida.

“ You are a fiend, after all, then. Well, then, come along, and let's see what kind of ball-dress my god-mother has sent me.”

This may be called a thorough capitulation.

The box was brought in and opened ; the most exquisite of ball dresses produced, and with Zeneida's aid, duly tried on. In it Bethsaba showed herself to her husband.

“ Shall I look lovely ? Shall I turn many men's heads ? ”

“ Every one of them ! ”

“ Oh, take care, take care ! You must not embrace me, you will crush my lace ! ”

This is the way in which a man is deprived of his wife, in the very midst of his honeymoon.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### THE FEAST OF MASINKA.

THE Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is according to the Russian Calendar, at the end of August ; thus, twelve days later than according to astronomical calendar. By this we see that the Czar of Russia has power to command even the sun. According to Russian Calendar, every four hundredth year is short of three days, therefore in the course of twenty thousand years it will be summer in the winter quarter, and winter in the summer quarter, in Russia. The Czar can even effect this.

However, now it is the beginning of autumn, the best time of all the year in St. Petersburg. Days are shorter and not so hot ; the nights are moonlight ; and, one-third of Russian women being named Mary, there is a festive tone in all houses, and at night, when fireworks begin, there are more stars to be seen on the earth than in the sky.

Korynthia, too, was a Mary ; hence had every right to celebrate the day.

The summer palace of Prince Ghedimin on the island of the Neva rivalled in magnificence the Imperial Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. The ball-room was large enough to hold a thousand people.

Among those invited were the Czar and Czarina, the Grand Dukes and Grand Duchesses, their relatives, then staying at the Russian Court, the Czar's brother, the Grand Duke and Duchess of Weimar, the Prince and Princess of Orange. All combined to add

brilliancy to Prince Ghedimin's ball. And yet Maria Alexievna Korynthia was far more anxious to know if Zeneida and Bethsaba were coming, than about any other of her guests.

Fräulein Ilmarinen and Frau Pushkin had certainly written in most courteous and gushing terms the day before, stating that they would be there. Russian women, by the way, surpass even French women in the art of writing flowery notes—especially if they hate each other. But every one knows the value of such promises. No one can write the day before, "I shall be having a headache to-morrow," but an hour before the ball any one can send a note of excuse by the footman, "I am in despair at being unable to come. I have such a violent headache." Of such excuses, women possess a perfect arsenal.

To the Princess's great content, however, instead of the expected letter of excuse, both ladies put in an appearance ; and in good time, before the dance music had begun, it being etiquette to arrive before the imperial guests. Zeneida always knew what was the right thing to do.

Fräulein Ilmarinen was wearing for the first time that evening the order conferred upon her by the Czar—Bethsaba, the ball-dress sent her by her godmother. She was strikingly lovely ; even the close vicinity of Zeneida did not detract from her charms.

Korynthia rising, advanced to meet them ; first she greeted Bethsaba, as the married woman ; then she turned to Zeneida. Zeneida forestalled her greeting.

" You forestall me !" exclaimed the Princess. " Of course, *queens* ever give the first greeting."

" Not so, Princess ; but they who desire to offer their congratulations on their hostess's Name Day."

And the two ladies shook hands. They knew that every eye was upon them, wondering how they would meet.

Both were well-seasoned warriors.

The ball-room was so arranged that in all directions were small groves of exotics, with openings just large

enough for a couple to retreat into, and talk scandal or flirt, as the case might be. Little tables were there placed, and footmen went in and out handing refreshments.

Korynthia drew Zeneida into one of these floral retreats, and as they sat down together, whispered laughingly into her ear.

"You understood me. I expected no less from your clever intellect."

Zeneida, adopting her tone, replied in equally laughing voice.

"That I have brought you the dove out of her nest?"

"Just so—that we have thus become allies?" resumed the Princess.

"An alliance *ad hoc*, in the language of diplomacy," interpreted Fräulein Ilmarinen.

"For the object of discomfiting a third adversary," filled in Korynthia.

"And meanwhile England and Russia have signed defensive and offensive alliance——"

"In order, as allied powers, to conquer Paris," laughed Korynthia.

"The same Paris who keeps the golden apple, in order to give it to—whom?" exclaimed Zeneida, with a peal of silvery laughter.

"You are a demoniacal woman!"

"That I know. Your Highness has said it already."

"How you remember everything! But, to change the subject, three of your admirers are here to-night. We will soon settle the third of them. See, your little *protégée* is already absorbed. Her former admirer, Chevalier Galban, has caught her like a spider in his web. Do not be uneasy about her; she will not go back heart-whole. We will see to that. We understand one another!"

"Perfectly, Princess."

"No harm to her! But I do not think it will be her last conquest. For any one who has *begun* as

has my god-daughter, it requires no great sagacity to prophesy how she will *go on*. No need for us to grieve about her."

"Nor in such a case can we show any mercy."

"So, for the present, peace is concluded between us! After that, war to the knife."

"I first pull down my flag."

"Oh, that is only tactics, Fräulein Ilmarinen. Women never capitulate. That we both know too well. Do you know, I have never had opportunity to see you so close, though I have been so curious to get a good view of you. Tell me, do you dye your hair with saffron to make it such a lovely gold colour?"

The golden hue of Zeneida's hair was a natural beauty; but she whispered confidentially to the Princess.

"No; saffron has too pungent a smell. I dye my hair with berberis roots, in which purple snails have been steeped."

"And I never could understand how you get that exquisite complexion. Do you use violet roots?"

Zeneida laughed; the blush which heightened her complexion should have been answer enough—could she have told the truth. But she had come here to lie, and therefore answered in laughing accents—

"Oh, Princess, the preservation of this complexion is a perfect science. I have an old book, published in the times of Poppaea, which contains the receipt."

"Oh, among other things does that receipt advise laying a slice of beef upon one's face, on going to bed?"

"Yes, that and other things. I could send you the book; though, in truth, you do not need it. It would be the Graces clothing Anadyomene."

"Oh, you are as magnanimous an adversary as that French naval captain who shared his powder with the Englishman, and let himself be shot by him. To your offer I can only answer as did the Persian king to the Armenians: 'What use is it to send me your

sword, if therewith, you do not send me your arm also?" Of what use the secret of the cosmetic, if you do not make me an adept in that bewitching smile which none may resist?"

"Princess, you are like Napoleon, who had the art of raising a fallen foe."

"This time we are not foes, but allies"

The common foe (Bethsaba) here interrupted the amicable warfare by coming up to put the naïve question if she might dance the first polonaise with Chevalier Galban? She was heartily laughed at.

"You may do whatever you like! You are a married woman now."

What is known as a polonaise in the court balls of St. Petersburg is a promenade round the ball-room in short dance step, performed by the whole company according to the fancy of the first couple. We are, therefore, not to understand under that appellation the wild mazurka of former days, when the floor groaned under the stamp of the dancers; that was the dance of a period when every Polish nobleman was as good as the king; this is the dance of a time when every Polish nobleman is equal to—a peasant.

In former times both Czar and Czarina had headed the dance; and it happened to have been a polonaise in which Alexander had wounded the feelings of Elisabeth for sake of the beautiful Korynthia Narishkin—an insult the former had never forgotten.

The arrivals of the great, greater, and greatest personages put an end to conversation. Once these had arrived, people formed themselves into a circle, and waited for the august couple to make the round of the ball-room, after which the polonaise began.

Zeneida was presented to all the foreign princes, and received so much homage that, in its intoxicating atmosphere, she might well have lost sight of the one entrusted to her care. She was, however a tried general in such campaigns, and knew how to keep the whole field well under supervision, even to the

slightest detail. Attentively her eyes follow Bethsaba ; she sees Chevalier Galban, with languishing expression, whisper in her ear ; sees the young wife hasten up to her godmother with glowing cheek ; sit down by her, and then listen, surprised and startled, betwixt laughter and tears, to what her godmother is saying to her. She even divined what it was that was being said. She also saw the Czarina address Bethsaba, and enter into conversation with her with gracious condescension. And she saw, moreover, that these thousand guests here assembled to discourse sweet nothings, to jest, to trifle away the hours, were often the bitterest enemies, full of deadly hatred, ready at the first opportunity to give vent to their true feelings ; that the men in their uniforms, stiff with gold lace, their breasts literally sown with orders, who, hat under arm, bowed low to the Czar or to each other, were thinking, "To-day or to-morrow either you or I will be giving each other an 'How d'ye do' with our heads, instead of our hats under our arm ;" that she, the singer, had but to say, "I am singing for the benefit of the Orphanage," and in an instant every sword would be out of its scabbard, and the men, now dancing *vis-à-vis* to each other, would be running their swords through each other's bodies, and the crowned chairs on the dais be overturned, no one asking themselves, "Who is sitting on those chairs ?" or, worse still, that same dais be turned into a scaffold. Conspirators and oppressors, murderers and executioners, all assembled in one ball-room ; every one knowing who everybody is so well, that when the Master of Ceremonies, in mistake, called out "*coup de main*," instead of "*tour de main*," there was a shout of laughter. They knew what they were laughing at. Only the Czar asked, "Why are the gentlemen so merry ?" .

All this Zeneida saw. The secret of every man there lay in her hands. Ah, she saw, too, very well, what motive the gracious lady of the house had in giving this brilliant entertainment. In order to

seduce a young wife from her troth? Oh, no! But in order to discover the key to a secret which he, to whom it was entrusted, had not divulged to any one—not even to his well-beloved wife.

With the departure of the court from the ball-room, the whole assemblage, as etiquette dictated, at once broke up. No one, moreover, was inclined to stay for the sake of enjoyment on that occasion.

— Zeneida, taking Bethsaba under her protecting wings, went off with her to Kreskowski Island. In the gondola the young wife was very silent, and Zeneida purposely abstained from asking her how she had enjoyed herself. Even after the two women had divested themselves of their ball-dresses, Bethsaba remained dreamy and melancholy. The chill of the river made hot tea a necessity before going to bed—in the paradise reclaimed from the marshes lurked ague. When they were alone together, wrapped in warm dressing-gowns and drinking their steaming tea, Bethsaba broke her melancholy meditations with—

“But tell me, then, is this, too, a part of religion?”

“What?”

“That a Christian wife, should another man choose to say to her, ‘I am wretched, dying for love of you, I will shoot myself if you remain cruel to me’—be bound to turn her love from her husband, and give it to that other, that he may not be unhappy—may not be forced to misery and suicide.”

“And they have told you that such is a woman’s duty?”

“Yes. And if religion requires that woman’s love should resemble that of St. Martin, who, when he met a shivering beggar, tore off half his mantle to give it him, I will return to my heathen belief, in which I am not required to distress myself about the welfare of any one but of my husband.”

"And all this was new to you?"

"I could have cried outright when I heard it. I thought my eyes would be burnt out of my head; I felt contaminated at listening to such words. The mere separation from Alexander had already made my heart as heavy as if I were mourning my dead; the very touch of another man's hand in the dance had pained me as if, in taking it, I were killing a dove; when I laughed, my heart accused me as if I were committing a theft; and with the laugh came the thought, 'And he has nothing now to cheer him. He is sighing for me, he is lonely, while I am merry. And all the time an evil curiosity was urging me on to hear more, to sound to the very depths the quagmire from which I was shrinking; and so I feigned to listen willingly."

"In that you did well."

"It would not have been good manners to run away, would it?"

"You would simply have been lost. A woman should never let it be seen that a man's seductive arts terrify her; a demonstrative repulse makes her at once his prey. I was watching you—you behaved admirably. Your expression was that of a woman who does not understand what is being said to her, who takes it all as a joke; and by so doing you led him on to speak still more explicitly."

"That is just what he did. Only think, impudent fellow! He actually had the audacity to tell me that for love of me he had bought an estate but half a day's distance from Pleskow, where he means to be spending the winter, and to be visiting us constantly. I was inclined to say, 'Oh, please, do not come!'"

"You did well not to say it; rather you should have replied: 'Alexander Sergievitch will always be glad to see you!'"

"That is what I did say. But then he sighed so deeply: 'Oh, if you will only tell me one day Alexander Sergievitch is going from home to-

morrow!' I should so have liked to give him a box on the ears for saying it!"

"But, instead of doing that, with naïve unconscious expression you asked: 'What good would that be? You surely would not be coming to see me when my husband was not at home? All the world would know of it.' To which he made reply, 'You are right. But you could come to my castle!'"

"How *do* you know that?"

"From what you have told me, and from what I saw. It was then that you felt inclined to cry."

"He said still more. 'You would have an excellent excuse to leave home while Alexander Sergievitch is away. Your mother, the Queen of Circassia, is in St. Ann's Convent in Novgorod. You would only have to say, I am going to my mother, who has not seen me since I was a child, to tell her of my marriage, and ask her blessing upon it.' So, even my poor mother he dragged into this infamy!"

"And upon that, leaving him, you took refuge with your godmother?"

"Did you notice that too?"

"In doing so, you had gone to the right place, and could tell all your troubles to sympathetic ears."

"Oh, if only you had heard what she did say!"

"I saw."

"How saw?"

"By your face. Every word of hers was reflected on your face. Did she not say, 'Poor Galban! If only you knew how much he has suffered on your account! He has actually been on the point of making away with himself. Then he wanted to bury himself, in the catacombs of Solowesk. It would but be giving a copper to a starving man out of your wealth. It should be kept secret; no one should know. It is the way all we women act; there is not a single exception amongst us. Besides, it is only paying back in the same coin. Every one of us is deceived by our husbands; you and I, and all of us. At the moment that Galban made his confession to

you, you may take it for granted that Pushkin was vowed his love to some other woman, who would not be so scrupulous as you."

"This is exactly what he did say; and more. This man—whose name my lips can never again utter—is capable, for sake of me, of exiling himself from St. Petersburg, of renouncing his brilliant position, merely that he may live near me! He is capable, in his despair of killing Alexander, me, himself, if I torture him longer. Oh, how he has terrified me! As soon as I get home, I will tell it all to Alexander, and taking his hand in mine, will implore him to run away to the other end of the earth with me."

"By so doing, you would accomplish just the contrary of what you desire. Just this: that Pushkin would be aroused, and, not having been conceded permission to return to St. Petersburg, would challenge Galban to go to him, and their duel would end fatally. Do not be afraid of him! Fight him yourself!"

"I? I fight him? Galban? I, a weak, foolish, cowardly little creature, who tremble at every word he utters?"

"You tremble and are fearful, because you believe your heart in danger. But how if you knew that the net is not thrown out to catch your heart, but Pushkin's head? that it is his life against which every mesh has been forged; then you would not be a coward."

"What do you say?—that it is against Alexander's life their plots are directed?"

"Silence! Question no further! When we have retired to bed, when we are quite alone, and there is no ear to overhear us, I will tell you all, and will teach you what you have to do. And now put your hair in curl-papers. The day after to-morrow we have to attend the grand farewell ball at Peterhof. There you may tremble, there show what a weak, innocent, timid little wife is capable of, when her husband's life is at stake!"

"If that be so, I will not be afraid ; I will be bold as a lion and cunning as a serpent ! I have not the courage myself to pin a butterfly, but the man who threatens my Alexander I could pierce to the heart. Mashallah ! *I am the daughter of my mother !*"

Zeneida then instructed Bethsaba in a part which she played to perfection to the end . . . at present, however, we may not divulge the plot of the play.

At the brilliant farewell ball, given by the Czar to his royal guests at Peterhof, the Russian Versailles, Bethsaba had the honour conferred on her of being presented to the Czarina. The Czar had long known her as Sophie's playfellow. It was he who led the Georgian princess to tell the Czarina of the land of her birth. Bethsaba, the little Scheherezade, half closing her eyes that she might not see those around her, began to tell of the land where winter is unknown. Who could fail to be eloquent when speaking of his native land ? Of sky clear as crystal, of air aromatic with balsamic fragrance, of woods where the leaves of the trees neither wither nor fall, of rivers which never freeze, of fields always gay with flowers, of the mighty ice-covered mountains which shut in the laughing valleys, and where vital power and buoyancy are diffused in grass, trees, water, and air, and the dwellers in that sunny clime know neither sickness nor decay.

That to which all the most learned doctors in the world had been powerless to persuade the Czarina —the change to another climate—was brought about by the enchanting chatter of simple, childlike lips.

Taking her husband's hand, the Czarina uttered—  
"I should like to see that sunny land."

Those words, "I should like," are often more powerful than any mere word of command.

Courtiers and conspirators, who at this dazzling entertainment had grouped themselves about the superb fountains of the Sampson Springs, had not

the slightest conception that, in the course of a short ten minutes, one delicate woman, with her rosy, child-like lips, would effect such a complete revolution—that one peal of silvery laughter would blow to the winds their canon, their army, their plan of campaign. The fairy-tale of the Circassian king's daughter had this pre-eminence over all other fairy wonders, that it extinguished the impending outbreak of a volcano by a drop of water.

This drop of water had shone in the Czarina's eyes when she said—

“I should so like to go there! There I should get well again.”

\* . \* . \*

That same evening Chevalier Galban met Bethsaba again. She was afraid of him no longer; she had learnt from Zeneida how it beseemed her mother's daughter to act.

At the close of the ball the Princess and Zeneida met in the vestibule. They were waiting for their carriages. From Peterhof to St. Petersburg people go by road.

The Princess accosted Zeneida with—

“It is settled. I thank you for your co-operation.”  
(Bethsaba was under the escort of Chevalier Galban.)  
“We are quits now.”

“The little goose has confessed all. She has gone thoroughly astray. She even acknowledged that you had helped her on.”

“The chatterbox!”

“I fancy that she will be making somebody very, very unhappy.”

“So do I.”

“Then the fight between us can begin afresh?”

“I think not. I renounce any claim to console the unhappy.”

“Oh, you do not want to make me believe that you are acting without personal feeling.”

“Certainly not. But what will result from this

evening's work will be a monster needing two mothers. The one revenge ; the other love."

"And you choose revenge?"

"I give you the second, Princess."

"I have not yet forgotten the diplomatic saying that treaties are only made to be broken."

Meanwhile Prince Ghedimin had come up to conduct his wife to her carriage. Seeing Zeneida, he started.

"Do just see," exclaimed the Princess, in an affected tone, "how low-spirited he is! He has grown quite melancholy. For days together I cannot drive him from my side; he will not stir from me. If only he had something to talk about! But all he can do is to knit his brows and ruminante. I do beg of you, Fräulein Ilmarinen, in consideration of our alliance, to do me a favour. You are a perfect enchantress—just say one word to him. I am convinced it will cheer him."

"Do you really desire it?"

The look Prince Ghedimin cast upon Zeneida expressed both fear and uneasiness. He was "the chosen dictator." If Zeneida uttered the words, "I sing," he must forthwith draw his sword out of its scabbard, exclaiming, "I fight!"

Zeneida attempted the magician's feat of curing the Prince's melancholy with one word.

"The summer has quite left us, Prince, has it not? Winter is upon us."

A sufficiently commonplace remark! Imagine talking about the weather!

Prince Ghedimin acquiesced.

"And I fear we shall have a very unpleasant winter if we too do not go to the Crimea, or the Caucasus, to luxuriate in a second summer."

A very ordinary speech! But that little word "too" had electrified the Prince. He seemed a changed man. His face brightened, his figure grew elastic, surely a miracle had happened to him!

"Come, my love," he said to the Princess, and to

her amazement began humming an air from a favourite waltz as they went down the stairs.

That woman is surely the devil in person! She says the most commonplace nothings, and in doing so, brings a dead man back to life.

And yet the Princess has carefully weighed every word spoken by Zeneida. Which can have been the magical one? The little word "too" had escaped her attention.

And it was from that one word that the Prince knew that the Czarina would go to the Crimea, and with her the Czar. His breast was relieved of a heavy load.

Chevalier Galban escorted the ladies to their carriage, and Bethsaba, leaning out of the carriage-window, looked back at him.

"I have caught her!" thought Chevalier Galban to himself.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### UNDER THE COMETS.

IN the summer of the year 1825 no oil was needed for the streets of St. Petersburg, the nights were so light. The first lighting of the lamps falls on the day the court leaves Peterhof for the Winter Palace. The lighting of the lamps, on this occasion, was looked forward to by many.

A great plan was in course of operation among the lower strata of society, a plan of which the more important societies were ignorant.

A succession of gloomy, rainy days came with the new moon. When on the fourth day a keen north wind blew away the clouds, people were astonished to see, near the silver sickle of the moon, a sign in the heavens like a fiery sword—a comet. So quickly had it come, that it was only perceived when in its full blaze of glory.

What is a comet?

Scientific men themselves do not know; how, then, should poor ordinary mortals?

A comet is the herald of pest, of war, of downfall! Let him who does not believe this, show reason why he is unbelieving. In wine-growing countries, it is true, that a comet year is said to promise a good wine year. But that does not affect the people of St. Petersburg, where they only make brandy. And a comet has no influence upon the increase of brandy. On the contrary, when there is any disturbance brewing in the empire, there is always but little brandy

consumed. It is a peculiarity of the Russian that he does not drink when in great trouble. When the head of the police learns that in St. Petersburg, instead of a daily consumption of five thousand casks of brandy, only two thousand are being consumed, he redoubles the patrols.

This portentous appearance only heightened the general feeling of excitement. A comet is the prophet's material symbol, concerning which he can cry, "Look, the fiery sword has appeared too in the heavens."

When Czar Alexander was leaving Peterhof, he gave orders that the Lord Chamberlain should precede the Czarina, to see that her apartments were in order on her arrival.

It was evening when the Czar, with a small retinue, neared the capital. Arrived at Alexander Nevski Monastery, he called a halt, and going into the church, commanded that a mass for the dead should be read the next day. As he left the church, standing on the terrace, he cast one long look at the capital, lying before him veiled in mist. The distant sounds came up to him like the roar of the sea; the traffic in the streets, the murmur of voices mingled together like the buzz of a bee-hive.

He stood there a long time, lost in meditation. The giant conflicts of a quarter of a century rose before his eyes out of the sea of mist, and he experienced that agony almost beyond human endurance—the consciousness of an approaching end, the mighty tasks of his life still unaccomplished. He had risen so high that he had half thought himself a god; he had fallen so low, that there was not a man who would have changed places with him. Napoleon and he had been the dominating personalities of that quarter of a century.

With much the same emotions must the prisoner of St. Helena have looked on the ocean surrounding him; the only difference between them being, that Napoleon's people ardently yearned to have their

conquered hero back, while this conquering hero has become a weariness to his country.

And that comet in the sky is like an illuminated pen, with which an invisible hand is writing the fate of empires and their rulers amid the stars. Alexander's spirit was ever inclined to mysticism. He was filled with forebodings and terrors. He was a believer in fate and its portents.

The Czar had an old coachman, known to every one by his long grey beard, which reached down to his girdle. This coachman always drove the Czar long distances ; he was the most faithful servant he had. As, on returning to his three-horsed troika, Alexander asked—

“ Ilias, did you see the comet ? ”

“ I saw it, your Majesty.”

“ Do you know that the comet is the forerunner of misfortune and mourning ? Ah, well ! The Lord's will be done ! ”

And he gave orders to drive to the busy city.

People told each other that the Czar was about to take a long journey. Whither, was not known. He intended taking the Czarina away from the inclement climate of the capital to more genial skies. He was himself going first, to secure quarters. Whenever he undertook a long journey it was his custom to hear the *Veni Creator Spiritus* in the Kasan Frauen Kirche. It was his own church ; he had built it, and had had it consecrated, and from its threshold he would get into his travelling carriage. The entire body of the clergy would await him there betimes, wearing their richest vestments ; his favourite choir, too, would be in attendance, to sing the collects ; and with bated breath it was whispered that when once priests, Czar, and Grand Dukes were collected together in the church, suddenly, at the Invocation, “ Confe, Holy Ghost ! ” a pistol would be fired, and straightway, church, holy images, Czar, Grand Dukes, priests and choristers would be blown into the air. An awful thought !

Perhaps to be realized. Perhaps already for days past some bold spirit—one of the Irreconcilables—has been crouching below in the crypt, the coffins filled with gunpowder, waiting for the signal of the bell, which calls the faithful together, to carry out the dread deed which shall overturn a mighty empire. But the fatality was prevented—forbidden by the ashes of the dead.

The next day, at early morning, the Czar was not driven to the church of the Holy Virgin in Kasan, where the richly-clad Metropolitan awaited him; but to the chapel of Alexander Nevski, where an Ascetic attired in black, the "Simnik," advanced to conduct him to the mass for the dead.

An official paper has categorically described this ceremony. How the Czar knelt before the Icons; how the protopope Seraphim placed the New Testament upon his head, he lying the while prostrate in the dust; how the Ruler of All the Russias did penance in the poor Simnik's cell, and how the Simnik told him of the degeneracy of the people. The account being authentic, it, of course, does not contain a single word that is not true.

It was a very different reason that had brought the Czar within those walls. Here rested the ashes of his three dead daughters, side by side—for he had had Sophie's remains removed here secretly. And it was these three children, deep down in the earth as they were, who combined to save their father, calling him to their calm, secure resting-place.

What had the father to say to his dead? The walls alone can make reply. Official report is silent.

As the Czar left the church, in which he had heard the mass for the dead, the sun was just rising, its reddish rays gilding the towers of the Church of SS. Peter and Paul, and the cupolas and cross of the Isaac Cathedral. Through the sea of mist, the hollow tones of the early bells vibrated long in the stillness.

All sounds were hushed as Czar Alexander looked upon the capital of his vast empire for the last time.

And as the troika, drawn by its fiery team, rolled rapidly away, the Czar turned to gaze, the better to impress the scene upon his memory, a scene which the rising mist was slowly, slowly, shutting out from his view. " "

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### THE MAN WITH THE GREEN EYES.

THERE was alarm, almost panic in the capital when the news became known that the Czar had started by the Sea of Azof, and the Crimea, to the Caucasus! Now people understood the meaning of the comet! It was the agent which had upset the calculations of wise men and fools alike.

Fearful curses echoed through the catacombs of the Church of the Holy Virgin of Kasan, when it became known that the Czar had changed his plans and gone to Alexander Nevski Chapel! The plots, the fulfilment of which was to shake the world, had been a failure! The Czar had left St. Petersburg, and betaken himself to a remote spot nineteen hundred versts away, nearer by thirteen degrees to the Equator. He had betaken himself to a land where conspiracies do not flourish ; he had escaped the giant trap laid for him. The plot of the "Free Slavs" had come to naught, which was to have begun the work of freedom, with the immediate murder of the Czar. Now the plot formed by the "Northern Union" came to the fore, which was to carry out the constitution planned by the "green book," either by forcing the Czar to initiate it, or by his exile. In either case, without violence to the crown.

The Czar started on September 13th, seven days before the date fixed for the grand review. By this means the net of the military conspiracy was also rudely torn asunder.

The members of the Szojusz Blagadenstoiga

hastened to confer at Zeneida's palace, not waiting invitation. What was to be done now?

Twenty-three among the twenty-four said, the whole thing must be begun afresh. The four and twentieth was Jakuskin, who said—

"If all of you fall away, I remain firm. Discuss, as you choose; I act." And with these words, he left the meeting.

Hence the chase had begun. As the hungry wolf pursues the hare through steppes, forests, marshes, so Jakuskin pursued his prey.

The Czar had a six hours' start of his enemy, who fully expected to get over the ground quickly enough to come up with him. He had a strong Caucasian mare, accustomed to do its twenty hours a day, and then graze on any grass at hand. The rider was worthy of his horse; he, too, could content himself with a piece of bread and bacon, and take his four hours' sleep under any shrub by the wayside.

But the pursued went fast. Every day the Czar covered one hundred and fifty kilometres—i.e., a twenty hours' post—only allowing himself four hours' sleep. He was also accompanied by a large escort; but that was no impediment to Jakuskin's plan.

Once to stand face to face with him was all he needed. He knew the way in which the Czar travelled. First a guard of Cossacks, well in advance of the rest of the *cortege*, that the Czar might not be incommoded by the dust of their horses' feet. Then in the first carriage, the Czar, easily to be recognized by his coachman, Ilias, his long beard fluttering like a couple of flags on either side the carriage. With him is his adjutant, Count Wolkonsky. The count is a small, undersized man; the Czar a man of splendid physique—tall, athletic, with a head small in proportion to his size. Impossible not to recognize him.

If only Jakuskin could get in advance of his intended victim! But this he could not do. The pursuer's worst hindrance was the moonlight, which

turning night into day, enabled the imperial *cortége* to travel continuously, and thus prevented his stealing a march. Fortunately, on the seventh day, when they reached Kursk the sky suddenly clouded over, and stormy weather set in. The moon no longer replaced the sun, and driving by night was impossible—but not riding.

This gave hopes of overtaking the Czar. But these hopes also were doomed to be frustrated.

He was to experience that nothing is impossible to the great of the earth. When the Czar is in haste even darkness must yield. Once when Jakuskin, galloping in the pitch darkness over break-neck paths, had got nearly up with the escort, it was but to see that the Czar's way was illuminated. Men carrying lighted torches were riding on either side of the Imperial carriage.

"All the better!" thought Jakuskin to himself. But later, when he neared the high-road, he saw that as far as the eye reached, at a distance of three hundred paces apart, were faggot heaps, serfs standing beside them with lighted matches; and as the Czar approached, one heap after another blazed up, lighting the way. This went on till break of day. The Czar rattled over the ground by artificial light.

Thus the wolf hangs back, gnashing his hungry teeth, when he sees firelight. These bonfires along the highway destroy his calculations. He must give up the pursuit; now he may allow himself time for sleep.

He did not move from the hut in which he had taken shelter for a week, not, in fact, till the Czarina's *cortége* approached. She travelled more slowly; the distance which the Czar had covered in twelve days she accomplished in twenty-four. Jakuskin followed on her track. The journey came to an end at Taganrog.

Taganrog is a seaport on the Sea of Azof. It is a modest little town which has twice been entirely

deserted by its inhabitants, having once been made over by the Russians to the Turks, the next time, at conclusion of peace, by the Sultan of Turkey to the Czar. At present it is inhabited by Greeks. It was only due to the chance throw of a knife that it did not form the site of the capital of the empire. When Czar Peter conceived the idea of founding a new capital on the sea, he was in doubt whether to build it in the Finnish marshes or the Tartar steppes. The throwing of a knife decided it. If it had fallen point downward Taganrog would now be St. Petersburg ; and the cupolas of Isaac Cathedral would be reflected in the Sea of Azof instead of in the Neva.

Jakuskin knew beforehand that the Czarina would not be staying here. There was not a single garden in the whole town. No one planted a tree lest his neighbour should gather the fruit. The first cutting wind that blew would teach the Czarina's physicians that a place is not Italy because it happens to be in a certain latitude. The Czar would seek some spot in his vast empire for his beloved invalid to rest where the trees are green all the year round. He has two places to chose between, Georgia and the Crimea. Both countries a paradise to the Russians, who for eight months in the year are accustomed to see nothing but icicles about them.

Hardly had the Empress Elisabeth installed herself in the Castle at Taganrog before the Czar started upon his voyage of discovery. He set out in the direction of Novocserkask.

Jakuskin concluded that he would go on to the Caucasus. All preparations were made to that end ; post-horses and escorts bespoken as far as Tiflis. Easy to chose a point where to lie in ambush.

But the Governor of the Crimea, Prince Woronzoff, came, and had so much to tell of the lovely climate and surroundings of the Crimea, that the Czar, suddenly altering his itinerary, turned back ; and Jakuskin only knew of the change when he had got ahead of the Czar by a day's journey.

Once more he posted after him until he reached the marshes of the Dead Sea, where the evil spirits of malaria await the traveller. He did not catch up with the Czar until his arrival at Simpheropol, reaching it at the very moment when the whole city was blazing with illuminations in honour of its illustrious guest.

But the Czar did not sally forth to enjoy the brilliant sight. Tired out, he had gone to bed. Jakuskin learnt that the horses were ordered early next morning ; the Czar was going to visit Prince Woronzoff's far-famed palace in Jusuff.

Jakuskin caught up the carriages at Bajdar ; they were empty. Leaving his carriage to pursue its way along the high-road, the Czar, on horseback, accompanied by his escort, had taken the steep mountain-path of Tsatir Dagh, a distance of some five-and-thirty versts.

The Czar's whole journey was conducted in as capricious a manner as if it had been dictated by some one knowing that he was being pursued, and as if this zigzag progress from valley to valley by impassable paths was intended to deceive.

And how many favourable opportunities had Jakuskin missed ! The Czar had felt so free from care among the simple Mahomedan populace that he had wandered for hours on foot and on horseback among the exquisite gardens and woods. As he strolled along the lovely valley of Oriander in full bloom, he had said, meditatively, "Here I would fain spend the rest of my days !" Torturing care, melancholy's dark phantom, found no place here ; it was as effectually scared away as were the conspirators. At his physician's earnest entreaty, leaving the sea-coast, he turned to the interior of the peninsula, to the whilom capital of the Tartar Sultan, Bakcsi Seraj ; and in the palace of the former Ghiraids passed the night.

All through that night and the following day there sat at the gate of the palace, beneath the cypresses

which have made Bakcsi Seraj so famous, a dervish. That dervish was Jakuskin.

At length he had found the Czar. Wrapping himself in his burnous, he sat and waited until his victim should come forth. He is certain of his object. In his girdle glistens a sharp dagger. His hand does not tremble.

Once more the Czar escapes. He passed close to the dervish ; his dress brushed him by, and yet Jakuskin does not recognize him ; for, attired as a Tartar chief, the Czar had gone out of the palace quite alone, without attendant of any kind. Had he but been attended by a single person, Jakuskin must have detected him ; but one man alone escapes notice. The Czar had wished to visit the "Valley of Tears," about which the bridegroom of his favourite child had written. This romantic fancy had saved him from the assassin's knife. Thence he went, still in the same dress, to a Mahomedan mosque, and stayed through a Moslem service. After which, not returning to the palace, he met his retinue at the Stadholder's Castle. There he found a despatch, containing news of the death of King Maximilian of Bavaria, brother-in-law to the Czarina.

Alexander was alarmed. Should this news have reached his wife, it might, in her delicate state of health, have seriously affected her. So giving command to start instantly, he did not return to the palace.

The dervish sitting at the gate awaited his prey in vain. When at length he heard that the Czar had gone, the latter had already got a considerable way towards the other side of the isthmus.

And now the pursuit began once more ; and with it came to his mind the saying, "For him who has been chosen by the man with the green eyes it is in vain to whet the knife." He was growing superstitious ; his imagination filled with green-eyed spectres.

The Czar pursued his way by the Dnieper, thence through the Nogai Steppe, and over the silk-growing

plains of Mariopolis to the shores of the Sea of Azof, where his beloved consort was awaiting him. Jakuskin following close upon his track.

As he crossed a bridge after passing Orekhof, his horse stumbling, broke its leg. Jakuskin had to proceed on foot. It was not far from the post-house ; thither he went. A horse he must have at any price.

The postmaster led him to the stable.

"Look, my lord, I have not a horse left. The Czar has just passed through ; every horse I had has been requisitioned for himself and retinue."

"And that one in the corner ?"

"That horse is not mine. It belongs to a courier just arrived from Kiev, who went at once to bed, and is fast asleep."

"A courier who can allow himself to sleep on the way cannot have any very urgent business. Perhaps I can persuade him, for some good gold pieces, to sleep on until I have reached Mariopolis on his horse ; whence it shall be sent back to him."

"You can try it, my lord !" It was not such an unheard of thing in Russia for a courier to sell his horse from under him.

"If he will not lend me his horse, I'll put a bullet through him," muttered Jakuskin to himself, as he entered the guest-chamber.

A young officer of a lancer regiment lay on the bed, wrapped in his cloak.

"Good day, comrade," said Jakuskin.

"Don't talk of good days," returned he, his teeth chattering. "I am shivering all over. That confounded Caucasian fever has laid hold of me on the road. It's all up with me. And I had a despatch to deliver into the hand of the Czar himself, wherever I might come up with him. General Roth sent me—delay is most serious. And I cannot sit my horse ! I say, my dear fellow, do me a good turn, and take charge of this despatch. Take my horse. The Czar has gone to Taganrog. Haste after him ! Give him this despatch—into his own hands. Those were my

orders! As for me, I shall only be able to report myself to him in the next world. Lose no time, I entreat you."

Nothing could have been more welcome to Jakuskin. A despatch which must be delivered into the Czar's own hands—the Czar!

"Heaven be with you, comrade! You may die with an easy mind. I will faithfully carry out your commission; and if you have a betrothed I will write her where you breathed your last; and will send your mother your watch and chain. You could not have found a better substitute."

The officer probably died, and was buried in that picturesque steppe. Jakuskin, mounting his horse, placed the despatch entrusted to him in his breast pocket.

But the horse given over to him was a sorry jade, and not accustomed, as his other had been, to the steppes. He could make but few miles a day, and whenever he came to a bridge, his rider had to dismount and drag the animal across. It would not go over a bridge.

Owing to such a bad mount, he did not reach Taganrog until four days after the arrival of the Czar.

One day Jakuskin discovered that the Czar intended going from Alapka to Mordinof. Now there was but one road to it, and that only a bridle path—a path called by the natives "the ladder." It well merited its cognomen, rising so steeply up the mountain side, that sometimes the horse has to force its way through narrow clefts in the rock.

Jakuskin hired a Tartar guide, who was to lead him through the forest to the summit of "the ladder."

Before dawn, in the dead of night, he made his start, to be there before the Czar. He was dressed in the costume of a tartar huntsman, a double-barrelled gun slung over his shoulder. Emerging from the thick forest, he saw the steep mountain path before him. Over a spring, gushing from out the rocky wall, grew a bush, some ten feet distant from

the path. The path itself was intercepted here by a cleft in the rock, across which a narrow bridge had been thrown, only wide enough for one horseman to pass at a time.

• The most favourable spot possible for an ambush.

“Hi, lad! How green your eyes are!”

The man laughed, a hollow low laugh, as though out of an empty cask.

“You’re right; my eyes are green.” He spoke, and disappeared in the thick underwood.

Bethsaba’s tale came into Jakuskin’s mind. He drew back behind the tree, loaded his gun, and waited.

A vulture flew over him with hoarse scream; he had taken the man in ambush for a corpse, so motionless was he.

At length was heard the long-expected signal. The path groaned beneath the tramp of horses. The riders must force pass quite close to him. He could aim as slowly as he pleased.

Only when the horsemen came up did he discover how persistently he had been the sport of fate. They were merely outriders; the company passed; the Czar was not among them.

Where could he be?

“Confound you, you fellow, with your green eyes,” said Jakuskin, with an oath. “You will be making me into a superstitious fool!”

There was no sign of the Czar. He had escaped.

• It is a delicious autumn day, such as is only to be met with in the enchantingly beautiful mountains of Taurida. The air is so pure that the distant ranges are brought near; silvery threads of gossamer flutter from every branch; the autumnal tints are an exquisite mixture of gold and red; the turf is strewn with pink anemones. That little spot of earth is the orchard of the world. There is a perfect forest of fruit trees here, groaning under their ripe loads.

Fallen apples and pears cover the ground. Black-birds sing their praises to the owner of the woods, who grudges of his plenty neither to the wanderer nor to the birds of the air. The giant trees, which in other countries only bring forth wild pears, are here laden with luscious fruit sweet as honey. What can be gathered with the hand is the passer's-by, the rest is the property of the owner.

Czar Alexander was delighted with the wealth of fruit in this fairyland. He began to believe in Betsaba's fairy stories.

In one place, where the path led up through two rocky walls, the sound of bells came wafted down.

The Czar, accosting a Tartar who was descending the rocky path toward him, asked—

“Where are those bells which are ringing?”

“In St. George's Monastery,” was the answer.

“Who built a monastery in this wilderness?”

“It is the former Temple of Diana. Among its ruins the black monks, who came here from Mount Athos, have settled.”

“So this is, then, the famous Temple of Diana, in Tauris?” returned the Czar, suddenly recalling to memory the tradition of the lovely priestess of Artemis, Iphigenia, of whom poets from Euripides down to Goethe have sung. “And is this temple a monastery now?”

The Czar never passed a church without entering it. And here was an additional attraction to the sacred building. It was a piece of historical antiquity, a relic of classic times, as well as a Christian asylum in a Mohammedan province.

“How does one get to the monastery?” he asked the Tartar.

“By a footpath which forks off from the ascent, and leads round past the monastery to the regular path again. The horses would have to be sent on, the way can be only accomplished on foot. It is somewhat difficult to find. I could guide you.”

The Czar was now more than ever anxious to see

it. So, alighting from his horse, he ascended the path with the guide to the Temple of Diana. It led through a thick forest. On either side picturesque groups of trees lined the way ; wild vines festooned the branches, forming a green roof overhead, from which hung bunches of little round grapes, called in Tartar language, "kacsi." Other fruit-bearing trees abounded ; among them towered two bushes bearing plums, the one rosy red, the other waxen yellow. The yellow plum has a large stone ; the red one grows in the form of a grape.

"What do you call this fruit ?" the Czar asked his guide.

"The yellow is called 'alirek,' the red 'iszumirek.'"

"Gather me some. I should like to taste them."

The guide, hastily breaking off some blackberry leaves, formed them into a basket, and filled it with red and yellow plums.

The Czar was heated from the mountain ascent, and thirsty. The ripe juicy fruit, with its pleasant acid, was very grateful to him. He left none. Only on returning the empty basket to his guide was he struck by something in the man's appearance.

"Countryman, what peculiar green eyes you have!"

"Yes, so people say. I have never seen my own eyes."

After an hour's walking the Czar and his attendant reached the classic ruins, now the monastery. He was wet through with perspiration from the exertion of the long climb on a hot autumn day ; still overheated he passed through the subterranean passages, visited the caves at one time appropriated to youths destined for sacrifice ; and those secret hiding-places cut out of the rock, whence Orestes had formerly stolen the golden statue of Artemis. After which he visited the chapel, and remained some time in prayer.

On leaving the monastery he sent to seek his guide, but he was nowhere to be found. No one had

noticed when he left them. The monks themselves conducted the Czar through the woods on the way to the "ladder," where his horse and horsemen awaited him.

Thus the Czar avoided passing the yew tree where Jakuskin lay in wait for him.

That same day the Czar was forced to confess to his physician that he was feeling a strange languor in all his limbs, accompanied by attacks of shivering. But he would not be persuaded to take any remedies, saying it would pass off of itself, and continued his journey.

He visited the ancient Akhtia; which now bears the high-sounding name of Sebastopol; was present at the launch of a man-of-war, and inspected the Pontus fleet. He commanded a trial of the coast defences, and, despite the recurrence of fever, was untiringly occupied throughout the day; late in the evening he again went into the church to pray.

When Jakuskin took the despatch from the dying messenger, and placed it in his bosom, the thought flashed through his mind that it might carry infection; but he dismissed it with—

"Bah! How ridiculous to fear a scrap of folded paper!"

And yet Jakuskin would have done himself and his friends better service had he taken to his bosom one of the horned serpents which lie in wait for the traveller by the side of ditches, or in coach tracks, rather than that piece of paper.

He thought to himself, "Let the despatch contain what it may, as long as I deliver it to the man for whom it is intended!"

The story of the despatch was this—

In the Southern Army all preparations had been made for the proclamation of the Constitution. Pestel—called the Russian Riego—had up to now won over one thousand officers, including even generals, to the conspiracy. Pestel himself had been chosen as the future Dictator, who, with the

Southern Army, was to hasten to aid in proclaiming the Greek Republic ; whilst Ghedimin, as civil governor, was to construct the new republic within the Empire. It had been planned that on January 1st, 1826, the "Viatka" regiment, commanded by Pestel, should march into the head-quarters of Tultsin. And that very day, every officer not among the conspirators should be slaughtered. From Tultsin they were to rush on to Kiev, take the commandant of the First Army Corps, General Osten-Sacken, prisoner ; proclaim the Republic ; incite the Poles to rebellion, and declare the abdication of the Czar. Entire regiments of infantry, hussars, and artillery, had been won over to this scheme, their commanders never even dreaming what was going on about them. Privates were won over by being told that the "German" officers were to be massacred. To massacre the Germans is naturally always a popular idea. The generals at the head of the army, Osten-Sacken, Wittgenstein, Roth, Diebitsch, were all Germans.

The whole of this bold plot had been wrecked by the weakness of one man. One among a thousand, a certain Captain Mairoboda, could not act against his conscience, and confided to his commander, General Roth, the whole details of the conspiracy ; giving the names of the superior officers, the leaders of the whole affair.

General Roth had written fully to the Czar, sending his report by an officer, to his imperial master at Taganrog.

The officer was seized by fever on the way, which quickly turned to typhus ; he was unable to press on to Taganrog. Fate brought Jakuskin that way, that he might be the one to replace the broken wheel of its chariot. Such were the contents of the despatch he had undertaken to deliver. With it in his bosom, he was himself converted into a witness against his fellow-conspirators.

When at last he pulled up his poor staggering

horse at the gates of the imperial castle at Taganrog, his first question to the officer on guard was, if the Czar were here?

The answer was that the Czar was here; and had not left his room for some days past. It was understood that the Czar was ill; but scarce four hours since an imperial messenger had been despatched to carry the joyful news to the Czar's mother, that last night his illness had suddenly taken a favourable turn, and he was recovering.

“Heaven be thanked!” sighed Jakuskin; while his hand sought his dagger.

Every circumstance combined to favour his awful scheme. The guard of honour of the imperial palace happened to have been taken from the “Viatka” regiment, both officers and men of whom had been won over to the conspirators. Well-known faces on all sides gave him secret looks of intelligence.

With determined tread he hastened up the staircase. The two grenadiers on guard at the door of the Czar's room, saluting, let him pass.

In the anteroom was the officer on duty, who greeted him by name as a friend.

“I seek the Czar, with an urgent despatch.”

“Go through. You will find there Adjutant Diebitsch, who will announce you.”

Jakuskin opened the door. At the same time the door was opened from the inside, and the man coming out and the one going in met on the threshold.

Jakuskin trembled. The face before him had *green eyes*. Or was it only his fancy? The man was wearing a tartar costume; his expression at once so singular, awe-inspiring, defiant, arrogant! Contempt, scorn, and sorrow mingled in his look, his eyes glittered like green beetles. As he pushed by an icy shudder passed through Jakuskin.

“Tell me!” he exclaimed to the officer, as he pointed to the man, “who is that fellow?”

“Some messenger or other.”

“Did you not notice his *green eyes*?”

“No. What the deuce do his eyes concern you ?”

Jakuskin passed on to the inner room. Here he found Diebitsch sitting at a table writing. He seemed in haste, for he did not raise his head.

“Am I permitted to go in to the Czar ?”

“You are.”

“Is he alone ?”

“Alone.”

“What is he doing ?”

“Sleeping.”

“I am the bearer of an urgent despatch to him. May I wake him ?”

“Wake him.”

The general did not look up from his writing ; did not observe to whom he was speaking. Jakuskin resolutely approached the door of the adjoining room. It seemed remarkable that the man he had addressed had not perceived, by the wild beating of his heart, what he was meditating ! A door only separated him from his victim—and that door stood open !

The Czar was already very ill on his return to Tarangog. Still he would hear of no remedies. It is a characteristic trait of Russian Czars to defy illness. They will not believe that Death (their chief agent), who has been so long in their service, who at their word of command has mown down rows of men like ears of wheat, will ever—brandishing his scythe backwards—cut down his lord and master. They are far too proud to concede that the pale spectre will ever see their weakness, hear their groans, limit their wills. Even Death, when he knocks at their door, they would bid to “wait.”

Or was it that the colossal figure, which like a second Atlas had so long borne the whole world on his shoulders, had grown weary of the burden ? That he, who had been accustomed to hear his praises echoed from the four corners of the earth, now shrank from hearing the murmurs born of revenge and bitterness, and that his soul yearned for the rest of

the grave? Earth has nothing more for him to do. He feels that he stands in the way of history. He has lost all that his heart held dear; his last ray of sunshine, his sick wife's smile, is but a fading "light in the sky of evening. Is it not possible that the giant, weary of life, and becoming aware of a call to another world, should, far from shutting out that call, open wide the doors, saying, "Here am I; let us go."

That day he had so far recovered that his illness seemed entirely to have disappeared. Even his physician was deceived by the symptoms; and, late that evening, a courier had been despatched to the Dowager Czarina in St. Petersburg with the glad news, "Alexander out of danger. No further fear for him."

But the next morning the benevolent spirit which comes alike to kings and beggars to ease them of their burdens, had appeared to him, saying, "Come home." For three days and nights Elisabeth had not left her sick husband's room. She was his constant nurse; her wifely affection his one consolation.

And to the Czar of All the Russias was granted the happiness—at the moment when every arm was turned against him, when the altar itself at which he prayed was undermined, when a vast empire was about to crumble to pieces around him, of yielding up his soul to Him who gave it (the light of the rising sun bathing his brow) with the words, "*Ah, le beau jour!*"—the happiness of having tender hands to close his eyes, and his faithful life's-companion to cross his arms upon his breast.

Then the sick wife's strength broke down utterly, and she sank swooning to the ground. The two physicians gently carried her to her apartment. The third man, who had been witness of the dying scene, hastened back to the study to send off the despatch to the Czarina-mother announcing the death of the Czar, giving the messenger instructions to make all speed in order to overtake the courier of the previous

night, and, if possible, precede him. After which his next care was to send off a letter to the Grand Duke Constantine in Warsaw.

At that moment Jakuskin had entered.

Diebitsch hastened on with his writing. His mood that of Russian cynical humour. "What is the Czar doing?" "Sleeping." "May I wake him?" "Wake him if you like!"

Or had there been something in Jakuskin's face which betrayed his plans, and was that why the adjutant's utterances had been framed so sarcastically?

The conspirator advanced into the room. At that moment no one was there. The Czar was alone. Jakuskin saw him whom he had been seeking lying silent, motionless, with eyes closed, his arms folded on his breast.

A mighty man—invulnerable—dead. Jakuskin dared not draw nearer. Before the dead Czar he trembled.

He rushed staggering back into the adjacent room, holding the despatch still in his hand.

"The Czar—?" he stammered.

"Is dead!"

"When?"

"This very hour."

"Why did I not arrive one day sooner, in order to deliver up this despatch to him!"

The adjutant thought this exclamation somewhat odd.

"I give you a piece of advice," said he to Jakuskin. "Make this letter into a bullet for your pistol, and shoot yourself through the head, and you will overtake him yet."

In truth, no bad piece of advice! Jakuskin would have done better had he followed it; instead, he dashed the despatch on the table, and flung from the room, uttering curses on his fate.

At the gate of the palace he again came across the man with the green eyes in the act of mounting his horse.

"You came too late, eh?" cried he, and driving the spurs into his horse's sides, dashed away.

Jakuskin shivered and trembled in every limb.

Elisabeth, as soon as she had recovered from her swoon, went back to her dead, and wrote the following letter to the Czarina-mother from the chamber of death :—

"BELOVED MOTHER,

"Our angel is already in heaven, and I still am left on earth. Who would have thought that I, the invalid, should have outlived him? Mother, do not forsake me, who now stand alone in this world of care and suffering. Our beloved has recovered in death his sweetness of expression; the smile upon his face shows that he is looking upon lovelier things than those of earth. My one consolation is that I shall not long survive, and shall soon be reunited to him."

Her presentiment was a true one. Next spring brought her to that land where Czar and serf alike are happy, and where there is no difference between them.

## CHAPTER XLV.

### THE HERALD.

THE science was not then discovered by which man can compel lightning to convey his messages, and by means of which any linen draper may nowadays flash the news that a son is born to him, or extend an invitation to his partner at the other end of the kingdom to attend the christening next day.

At that period it took eight days before so important a matter as the death of Czar Alexander could be transmitted, by means of the fleetest ukraine pony and its rider, from the remote end of the Russian dominions, where it had occurred, to the capital. The first messenger, bringing the news of the Czar's recovery, in fact, arrived before the second. He was spurred by the good tidings; sorrow went a more leaden pace.

Upon the arrival of the good news, ten members of the imperial house of Romanoff—the eleventh, Grand Duke Michael, being then at Warsaw with the Grand Duke Constantine—assembled to early mass in the chapel of the Winter Palace, the highest ecclesiastical dignitary being the celebrant. The chapel was crowded with high officials, magnates, and officers of rank. The choir intoned the collect, “God preserve the Czar!”

As the protopope was in the act of opening the jewelled book upon the altar, and with trembling voice was beginning to intone the prayer for the Czar's recovery, suddenly in the devotional stillness a

harsh voice, like the sharp stroke of a bell, called out—

“The Czar is dead!”

The terrified congregation mechanically made a passage for the new comer, whose light green beshmet was streaming with the mud of many a Russian province—the black mud of the Nogaj steppes, the yellow mud of Moscow, the chalky clay of Novgorod, and the greeny slime of Csarskoje-Zelo. In his hand the messenger held a letter, with which he pressed forward through the throng direct to the Grand Duke Nicholas. It was the Czarina's letter to the Empress-mother.

The Grand Duke, taking the letter, opened it.

Then, hurriedly going up to the protopope, whispered something in his ear. Upon which the protopope, covering the crucifix he held in his hand with crape, advanced to the Czarina Marie, saying, in a voice broken with emotion—

“Thy son is dead!”

And the choir breaking off their Te Deum, in another minute the burial hymn mournfully resounded through the chapel—

“Lord! send him eternal peace!”

The service which had begun as a Te Deum, had ended as a Requiem.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

“BEATUS ILLE . . .”

WHAT, on this earth, is true happiness?

To be able to dissociate one's self from the tussel and tangle of the political arena.

There is no such happy man on this earth as your landed proprietor, who only learns what is going on in the political world from the columns of his daily paper.

In the morning he goes out coursing; starts three hares, two of which are caught by his terriers; this is a real triumph. The third they let run; this is a disgrace. But on the way home his dogs seize and throttle a wild cat; that makes up for the former vexation. His horse stumbles over a stone; that is a great misfortune. But neither man nor horse are any the worse for it; and that is a piece of good luck.

Friends live within easy distance—jolly fellows—to whom he can detail the morning's doings; and who, in return, give their adventures.

At noon the wife awaits her husband's return to a well-spread board; and she hospitably presses his friends to stay. Cabbage with fried sausages is very acceptable after such an active morning! After dinner they find they are just enough for a game of tarok, and the husband can boast next day how he has conquered against long odds.

The only political allusion made was when Pushkin named the “fox”—Araktseieff; but even at that

the postmaster shook his head disapprovingly. Why disturb the harmony of the evening by such reference?

Then, as the company is about to separate, the postmaster suddenly remembers that he has forgotten to give Pushkin his newspaper which he had brought in his coat-pocket.

The paper was opened. Old-fashioned newspapers used to be sent out in envelopes. What news?

"A military review."

No one reads that.

Well, then, France: The French are content. How satisfactory! Turkey: Peace concluded with the Greeks. Evident enough! England: The Channel Fleet returned to Dover. And a good thing too! In Russia, nothing of interest has transpired. Heaven be praised!

After which, each lighting his lantern, repairs to his home. The master of the house seeks his wife's room. The good little woman has had time for her first sleep, and is not angry with his friends for staying so long at cards. Good little wife! Next day they rise late, because the snow has fallen so deep in the night, that their windows are blocked, and they cannot see out. What matter! One is not merely a Nimrod, but a Tyrtæus as well. If one cannot go forth to Diana, one can toy with the muses at home; they are good friends, too.

A man lights his pipe, paces the room, and poetizes, pausing at every comma and full stop to give his dear little wife a kiss; she, the while, busied in doing her hair in becoming fashion. If a rhyme be hard to find, he takes his wife on his knee, and looks into her eyes, and—the rhyme is soon found.

In the afternoon, the friends turn up again—the postmaster, a gentleman farmer, and a landed proprietor. They have not been deterred by the heavy snow. Two had driven over; for the third, Bethsaba had sent the sledge, that the party may be complete. She set out the card-table.

It is paradise—perfect paradise!

• But once the serpent succeeded in wriggling into paradise.

At the end of the game, when the long score had to be reckoned up, in order to see how many kopecs had been won, the postmaster was fain to turn out all his pockets to scrape together enough small coin wherewith to pay his debts. In so doing he extracted several letters.

"No news to-day?" the gentleman farmer asks him.

The only newspaper in that part came to Pushkin; so the neighbours always come to him to hear the news.

"What are you twaddling about? Did I not bring a paper yesterday? Do you think a press correspondent can afford to lie every day? Quite enough to have to do it three times a week. Poor devil! he must bless the intermediate days. If you must have a paper, read yesterday's."

• So we have, from beginning to end."

"I bet you've not read about the review."

"Right you are. Hand it over."

And it repaid the trouble of reading. For it stated that each regiment of Guards quartered in St. Petersburg had severally taken the oath of allegiance in the chapel of the Winter Palace. And why not, if they liked to do so? It would do the soldiers no harm. Ah, but it was to Czar *Constantine* that they had sworn allegiance.

"Czar *Constantine*? Who ever heard of a Czar Constantine?"

In the great confusion the press had *entirely forgotten* to officially announce the death of Czar Alexander.

"It's a slip of the pen," quoth the postmaster. "Perhaps the correspondent was drunk? Why should they not get drunk, poor devils, just once in a way?"

So the matter dropped. The writer of the article in question had been celebrating his name-day too

freely, and had written, instead of Alexander, Constantine.

In the next number, under *errata*, the mistake would be rectified.

But the next number brought no correction ; rather the "error" was repeated twofold, threefold — all edicts being published in the name of "His Majesty, Czar Constantine."

*The death of Czar Alexander was never officially announced.*

The worthy news-reading public only saw from their Sunday papers what was going on. These papers gave full details of the funeral services held in all the churches of St. Petersburg, and the official odes to the dead, which sang the fame of the deceased Czar in Russian, Latin, and Greek.

After that no one wondered that future edicts were promulgated in Constantine's name ; he was the Czarevitch, and, according to Russian laws of succession, heir to the throne. That the people did not love him did not affect the question. What had the people to do with it ? The soldiers had sworn him allegiance ; and the soldiers are the empire.

And what matters all this to those happy folk in the country house ? Their home was dear to them in Czar Alexander's time—that Constantine now reigns in his stead only makes that home dearer.

The Winter Palace has a new inmate, more unwelcome than the last. The former, as he wandered silent and melancholy among his courtiers, was hard to serve ; how much more the new one, who knouts, kicks, breaks men's bones, and swears. His cheerful moods excite more terror than did the other's depression.

On these accounts, the officer of the Guards, among whose private papers was an ukase, "by command of the Czar," forbidding him to leave Pleskow beyond a day's journey, might well be called a lucky fellow.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### THE TEMPTER.

ONE stormy winter's day, on which not even his neighbours dared venture out of their houses to make their customary visit to Pushkin, a sledge, amid the tinkling of many bells, drove into the courtyard, and, from out the midst of his fur wrappings and high felt boots emerged Chevalier Galban.

A host stifles all inimical feeling towards his guest ; the more so when he comes in such vile weather. The road was invisible from snow drifts, it was impossible to see where one was driving.

Pushkin welcomed Galban cordially. The pipe of peace was lighted in the warm, cosy room. Bethsaba prepared the tea.

"But, in the name of all that's wonderful, what brought you out of St. Petersburg in such weather ? "

"H'm ! My dear fellow, that your own experience can give you a good inkling of ! Your windows do not look on to Nevski-Prospect either ! You, too, have your reasons for being here."

"Right you are," said Pushkin, blowing the smoke in blue rings into the air, which rings gathered over Bethsaba's head, as an aureole over the head of a saint ; and, ostentatiously drawing his wife towards him, he put his arm round her waist as he said—

"This is my reason ! "

Galban laughed. "Well, I certainly cannot lay claim to such a reason ! " As far as I am concerned, it is a case of a rolling stone. The world is topsy-

turey. The old set have to fly for their lives.. Even Araktsieff is smoking his pipe at Grusino."

"That surprises me. Czar Constantine was his ideal. And I know that there is no one Araktsieff loves better than Czar Constantine."

"Yes ; if Constantine were the Czar, I, too, should have known what I was about ; but he is not."

"Not Czar?" said Pushkin, amazed. "But the papers give his name in all proclamations."

"But, my dear Alexander Sergievitch! You a writer yourself, and yet are naïve enough to believe what is in the papers?"

"The devil! But one must believe them when they announce that the Senate has proclaimed Constantine to be Czar ; and that the household troops have sworn the oath of allegiance to him."

"All the same, Constantine is not Czar. We live, my friend, in an age of miracles and absurdities. Official papers do not publish everything ; still, in St. Petersburg people pretty well know what is happening. When Constantine was proclaimed Czar, and, from Grand Dukes to Guards all had duly sworn the oath of allegiance to him, the President of the Senate, Lapukhin, produces a sealed packet, upon which was inscribed, in the late Czar's handwriting—'To be opened in Cabinet Council after my death.' The seals were broken, and within was found a document in which Grand Duke Constantine, the Czarevitch, renounced his succession to the throne in favour of his younger brother, Grand Duke Nicholas. A second document contained in the packet was Alexander's will, wherein he states that he had accepted Constantine's renunciation of the throne, and naming Grand Duke Nicholas as his heir."

"So then Constantine is not Czar, but Nicholas. That is plain." Pushkin said this in a tone from which it was easy to infer that it was a matter of indifference to him.

"Not quite so plain as you think. Grand Duke Nicholas refuses the succession. He is a follower of

the old *régime* which accepts no change, and now the war of renunciation runs high between St. Petersburg and Warsaw. Grand Duke Michael, the third brother, acting as intermediary, goes from one to the other, requesting him to accept the crown."

"Anyway, a display of great brotherly love—unexampled in the world's history. Up to now princes have been more ready to seize than to repudiate a crown!"

"And what makes the farce complete is that two accomplished facts, contradictory to each other, have to be surmounted. It is an accomplished fact that Constantine has been proclaimed Czar ; and, equally so, that he has taken to wife Johanna Grudzinska, a Pole, a Catholic, and only of aristocratic birth, three circumstances which render it impossible for her husband to wear the crown. And so, on one hand Constantine cannot relinquish the throne ; on the other, he cannot ascend it."

"For all I care, let him stay where he is."

"You, in your Tusculum, can afford to make cheap jokes ; but what are all the poor devils about the court to do in such an imbroglio ?"

"Especially as his wife is more to the Czarevitch than his crown!"

"No more of that ? I had opportunity of putting that love to the proof. I assure you that it needed no magic to have led Frau Johanna to forget her grand ducal lover, for a *knightly* one. At that time she had not the right to call him husband. Ah ! had not a more powerful feeling swayed my heart"—a suppressed sigh and secret side glance at Bethsaba here explained his words—"truly in my hands would have lain the power to present Grand Duke Constantine the nineteen crowns of Russia—even a twentieth. It only needed me to have stayed one day longer in the Gardens of the lovely Lazienka."

Pushkin was disgusted at this bragging. He knocked the ashes out of his pipe. Galban's boasting he valued at the same rate as those ashes.

"I happen to know, however, that the Czarevitch and his wife are so devotedly attached to each other, that Constantine would not exchange Johanna's head-dress for Rurik's crown."

"But what if that is not due to Johanna's head-dress, but is the fault of Rurik's crown? A sensible man does not shelter from the storm under a fir tree if he mean to keep dry, and of all fir trees, the crown of a Russian fir is the most dangerous in a storm. Every one knows—even the sparrows twitter it—that the late Czar was only saved by the kind agency of Caucasian fever, from the fatality which awaits every Russian Czar. There are many rumours, even, about his end. People talk of poison. The *bon mot* of Talleyrand is going the round, 'It is really time that Russian Czars changed their manner of dying!' One shudders to say it, how assassination, treachery, conspiracy awaits him who sits upon Rurik's throne. The very kneeling chair, the altar, the church wherein he prays, is undermined. Is not this explanation enough why one brother vies with another in refusing the throne? The most open expression of feeling was that which caused the Czarevitch to explain the reason of his hesitation to the Queen Dowager of Saxony, in these words, 'Russian Czars need to have very strong necks; and I am not fond of having my neck tickled.'

So outspoken! Only *agents provocateurs* venture to say such audacious things.

Pushkin thrust the amber mouthpiece so far into his mouth that he could not bring out a word. Bethsaba saw that her husband was on thorns, and left the room. She had divined his wish, and ordered three sledges to be horsed and despatched at once to fetch their neighbours, hindered from coming by the snowstorm.

Galban, meanwhile, continued the conversation.

"You know very well who I was and what I am. My whole life long, I have been a courtier. I loved to serve, to obey, to intrigue. Never did I have the

least inclination to join a league of conspirators. I tell truth. But under the present circumstances a man's ordinary loyalty is of no account whatever. The whole country is at sixes and sevens. Even political leagues are disrupted. By the death of the Czar the ground has been cut from under their feet. There is no Czar. Against whom should they conspire? They have split up into two parties. If Constantine take the Crown, Nicholas will immediately be proclaimed Czar as well; if Nicholas, Constantine will be set up against him. The soldiers are ready to fire upon each other; each party will fight for their legitimate head. Under the counter battle-cry, 'Long live the Czar,' we shall have a fine revolution breaking out. Nor can one tell who will come out conqueror. If Constantine's party win the day, Nicholas's followers will be the rebels; if Nicholas's party gain the upper hand, it will be Constantine's followers who will suffer. The position of a man like myself is simply terrible. Whichever side I take to-day, how am I to tell if, with all my loyal devotion, I shall not to-morrow be proscribed as a rebel? Under such circumstances a wise man cannot do better than to leave the chaos to take care of itself, and flee to the woods to hunt wolves. And, I trust, Alexander Sergievitch, that we shall often join in that healthful pursuit together."

"I am not allowed to go a day's journey from Pleskow."

"Well, then, my estate lies within your boundary; just a short winter day's distance. Let us get all the enjoyment out of it we can, as long as this chaotic world endures."

Pushkin promised to return the visit shortly.

"Then, now we are friends, and companions," continued Galban, garrulously. "You may imagine the lamentations in St. Petersburg. Next March Czar Alexander was to have celebrated his five-and-twentieth year of accession. Every man about the court was congratulating himself on the prospect of

ascending a step on the ladder of rank. Numbers of them had had their uniforms made beforehand, and had prepared their answers for the forthcoming examinations. You are aware that all of us, when we get preferment, have to undergo an examination? Luckily for us, the professors give out the papers in good time; a golden key lets them out the sooner. And now all this has come to naught. I myself stood on the list, in the third rank of nobility, as director of the St. Petersburg theatre, and you figured in it in the rank of major. Three thousand aspirants! Most of whom had paid pretty heavily for their chances into Daimona's fair hands. Money thrown away now!"

This dangerous conversation was brought to an end by the noisy entrance of the three neighbours. Never had doors opened to more welcome guests. They had not, moreover, come to quarrel over involved questions of succession, but to play tarok, and it is an acknowledged axiom—tarok before everything!

Chevalier Galban excused himself on the plea that he only played hazard, and that for high stakes.

"Well, then, sit down, and have a game of chess with my wife. But look to your laurels; Bethsaba plays a good game."

Thus Chevalier Galban settled to a game that is the greatest hazard in all the world, and is played for the highest stakes of all.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### THE MOUSE PLAYS WITH THE CAT.

THE men flung their cards upon the table, as though they meant to make it suffer, and after every game set to quarrelling. "This card should have been played, not that, for we were winning!"

The men said things to each other which, had not the cards been in their hands, must have led to fighting. In the opposite corner of the room things went much more quietly. Here they only spoke in whispers, as is customary at chess.

"Sun of my life, now you can see of what a wounded heart is capable. Who other than a man, made a very fool by his love, would be paying visits at such a time?"

"Then you have not fled, in the political chaos, from the capital?"

"I? It is my element, in which I live as a fish does in water. It is my natural element. There has not been a change of sovereign throughout Europe at which I have not assisted. When Mars armed himself for the battlefield, I was the Mercury who bore his message. It is in order to win your smile that I have rent a career in sunder, have thrust a princely crown from me."

"And if I do not smile?"

"I should go mad."

"Oh, you are going back on your words! The last time we met you vowed you were mad for

love of me ; and now, are you only beginning to take precaution against it ? "

" Every day I begin to get mad afresh."

" That proves that every day your madness is cured."

" Does not my presence here prove that I am incurable ? "

" It was only the snowstorm that brought you here."

" The storm befriended me ! It gave me the right to come."

" Oh, our house is always open to guests."

" Our house ! What torture in those two words ! "

" Shall I say, ' My husband's house ? ' "

" That is preferable ! That manner of speaking in the plural only beseems kings, not queens."

" Russian women are no queens ; they follow the praiseworthy custom of antiquity."

" But your province is to make slaves."

" I have heard that the Turks once conquered a citadel which they had been permitted to enter as guests. Do you not perceive that you are misusing the rights of hospitality ? "

" Show me but by one look that my presence here is obnoxious to you, and neither storm nor night will exist for me. I will have my horses put to, and, despite snowdrifts, despite the howling of wolves, I will set out on my way."

" You are perfectly aware that you could find no reasonable pretext for such a step ; that Pushkin would not suffer it."

" I knew how it was ! Check to your king ! You will soon have lost the game. Then you will jump up indignantly, complain of the smoky atmosphere, and retire to your own room. I shall sit down behind Alexander Sergievitch's chair, and criticize his play. That is the way the best of friends fall out. One word leads to another. I am hot-headed, so is he. Finally, I let myself be turned out of doors. Now do you understand my game ? "

“Not yet. I can still castle my king. I will not allow you to leave our house.”

“If you say ‘our’ house again, I will leave it on the spot. The very thought that the same roof covers me, my happiness, and the robber of that happiness, makes even this paradise into purgatory. Check to your king and queen !”

“Then we shall be compelled to exchange queens. I take yours, you mine. I will not have you leave me. Who knows, after all, if the angel be as white as she is painted ?” she added, with a fascinating glance at the Chevalier. Zeneida had thus taught her. “You overlooked this move. Check-mate !”

“By Jove ! you have won !”

“Shall we begin another game ?”

“The conqueror has the first move.”

“Have you heard anything since of my poor dear mother ?”

“It is well that you have touched on the theme yourself. I assure you, had you not asked me, I would not have started it. And yet it was principally that which brought me here. The queen wishes to see you.”

“Really ? Since I was parted from her I have only seen her twice, in the Winter Palace, on New Year’s Day.”

“Now you will be seeing your mother face to face. I have managed to obtain permission for you to visit the queen in her convent.”

“Have you got it with you ?”

“Do you want to show it to Alexander Sergievitch ?”

“Oh no. I must be kept secret from him.”

“Then leave the permit in my keeping. It is in very good hands. Pushkin dare not accompany you himself ; it were an act of misdemeanour. As soon as you have opportunity to use it, you can obtain the permit from me.”

“Yes. If Pushkin were leaving home for a few days.”

" You send to me, and I will forward it to you at once."

" But with this sending to and fro two whole precious days will be lost. Would it not be better if I were to come and fetch it myself?"

Clever little woman!

" Were this happiness to fall to my lot, I would set fire to all four corners of my castle instantly upon your departure, that, after you, no other guest should be received there."

" Check-mate! I led you on beautifully! I merely went on chattering to take your attention off the game. It was a thorough stale-mate. And now you can retire to rest, Chevalier. Good-night!"

Bethsaba left the room. Chevalier Galban, however, rose from the chess-table with a full sense of triumph; he was convinced that he had won the game. As a rule, he was accustomed to win two out of every three games he played. The third he usually lost.

The tarok players had perceived nothing of what had passed. It had been a fearful battle that had been fought at this table. Alexander Sergievitch had lost a " solo " with Quint Major, *tous les trois*. It was a thorough defeat.

" Two kings in my hand, and both taken—a hundred thousand devils!" swore Alexander Sergievitch.

" Yes, those kings," boasted the postmaster, proud of his achievement. " We beat every one of those kings!"

" What?" began Chevalier Galban. " You beat kings?" " Upon my word! A thorough republican movement!"

The postmaster's interest in the game was so sensibly diminished by this speech that he proposed adjourning, and the exciting game came to an end.

Pushkin accompanied his guests to their sledges; then returned to Chevalier Galban.

" Well, how did your game go with my little one?"

"I was thoroughly thrashed. She played with me like a cat with a mouse. From whom did she learn to play such a capital game?"

"What, chess? Our dear Sophie Narishkin was her teacher. They used to play together every day."

But that was not the case. It was not Sophie, but Zeneida, who had taught the "little one" this game. This time it had been the mouse playing with the cat to her heart's content.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### THE ANTIDOTE.

LOVELY, sunny December days followed on the past arctic weather, with its snowstorms. Chevalier Galban returned home, having received a promise from Pushkin to make him a return visit very soon. Post traffic was resumed, that is, communication by means of slegging was once more practicable.

The official newspaper outdid itself in dulness. But at the end of the so-called news of the day, was an announcement to the effect that "*on December 26th, Fräulein Ilmarinen will sing, in the Imperial Exchange for the Benefit of the Orphanage!*"

The concert was announced eight days in advance, in order that all who desired to attend should have due notice.

Pleskow to St. Petersburg is two good days' journey. Allowing for the time for post to reach, Pushkin had six days' notice.

Bethsaba, too, read the announcement, and said—

"Oh dear! How I should like to be there, to hear my dear Zeneida sing!"

Her heart was filled with dread. She, too, knew full well—Zeneida had told her—what this concert heralded.

From that moment Pushkin was utterly changed—morose, melancholy. Bethsaba read in his face as in an open book. Had she not had the key to the hieroglyphics from Zeneida? She knew exactly what Pushkin was brooding over; she knew perfectly

well that "Eleutheria" was the name of his old love. And she concentrated all her love upon him, to hold him fast.

Was it such an unheard-of thing for men, renowned statesmen, to forget, in their domestic happiness, an appointment they had made with friend or enemy on the battlefield? How often it had happened that "great men," when once they had learned to know "the little world of love," had been fain to think how good it was to be "little" men! What happy people Lilliputians must be!

Vain endeavour!

For two whole days Pushkin fought with himself, then told Bethsaba that he must leave home on December 24th.

Bethsaba never asked whither, nor for how long; she only said, "And you are not taking me with you?"

"No, love. It would be impossible for you to travel in this cold weather; the roads are so bad."

"But not too bad for you! Can you not put off this journey?"

"Impossible!" returned Pushkin, irritably

The tone in which he spoke forbade further question. Bethsaba saw that the hour of the dreaded danger had come. The poison was already working in his veins. An antidote must be administered.

Going to her room, she wrote to Chevalier Galbain—

"Alexander Sergievitch is making preparations for a journey very shortly. I await your answer."

This significant letter she gave to a footman, with instructions to convey it to its address as fast as a sledge would take him.

After their conversation, Pushkin, seeing that his moroseness betrayed him, forced himself to be in high spirits. His friends said they had never seen him so merry. Bethsaba alone was not deceived.

At last came the morning of the dreaded day. Both rose early, that Pushkin might not be late in

starting. Just as he was getting into his fur coat, Bethsaba, throwing herself on his breast, said tremblingly—

“I cannot let you go without confessing a sin which I have committed against you.”

“Against me? What can that be?”

“I have been jealous.”

“About this journey?”

“Yes.”

“You are a little goose! Are you always going to be jealous when I go away for a day or two?”

“Only this time. I had been told that you were going to visit your old love, and that is why you wanted to go alone.”

“Was it Galban who gave you this information?”

“He said so when he was here. I asked him the lady's name. He answered he would tell it me *if I asked it again*. When I saw you making ready for departure, jealousy revived in me in all its strength. I lost my judgment. Kill me! Trample me underfoot! I wrote to Galban, entreating him to tell me the name of her for love of whom my husband was leaving me, and asked him to prove to me in writing the statement he had made by word of mouth. Read what he answers.”

And she gave him Galban's letter.

As Pushkin read the letter to the end, the world seemed to swim in blood before his eyes.

“ADORED LADY,

“If you would possess the desired document, deign to visit my modest dwelling; I cannot entrust it to strange hands.

“Your ever faithful slave,

“GALBAN.”

Pushkin looked in amazement at Bethsaba.

Trembling, his wife fell on her knees.

“Oh, forgive me! I did not know what I was doing! Do not beat me; I am punished enough by

the shame I have brought upon myself! I am for ever disgraced!"

Pushkin gently raised his wife.

"Do not cry! You have been a foolish child, that is all. In my eyes, you are purer than the angels. And I swear by Heaven that no shaine shall ever attach to you for this. Kiss me, and take comfort."

"And you forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive. A woman has the right to demand that her husband is as true to her as she to him. Such truth I will preserve to you. Now embrace me, and take good care of your dear little self. On my return, I will tell you who she was, at whose invitation I am undertaking this journey."

Bethsaba knew her well—"Eleutheria."

Pushkin, taking his weapons, sprang into his sledge, giving his coachman instructions where to drive.

The jemsik shook his head. They would never reach St. Petersburg by that road.

It was evening before Pushkin arrived at Galban's castle. It was an old-fashioned building, standing in the midst of extensive pine woods—a hunting-box.

The antidote was working splendidly.

Happiness had never succeeded in causing Pushkin to overlook an appointment; but jealousy is a strong antidote. There are men enough ready to give up love, happiness, means, rank, for freedom; but the world has not yet seen the man who would sacrifice honour for it. Place in one scale all the workings of passion, in another those of jealousy—the latter would weigh heavier. No tyrant in the world is hated so intensely as is a rival.

Had Brutus been told on the Ides of March that Casca had paid court to his wife, it would have been Casca, not Cæsar, who would have died.

Zeneida had laid the train cleverly. She knew the whole position.

For months past the two parties had been playing with open cards. Their plans had long been disclosed

to one another by means of secret agencies ; their very names known. But each hesitated to begin the attack. The members of the constitutional party were to be found amongst the highest statesmen, and even generals. That a collision would take place, all were convinced ; but none knew when. But there was a key to the exact period of the outbreak ; that key was the day of Pushkin's leaving home. The day he left Pleskow, to appear against his edict of banishment in St. Petersburg, was the signal. Chevalier Galban, Princess Ghedimin, and the followers of Araktsicoff were on the watch for it.

Knowing this, Zeneida had planned the intrigue which would effectually keep Pushkin out of the charmed circle on the eventful day.

Among certain nationalities her plan might easily have ended dangerously ; jealousy has often led to fatal results. But in Russia social opinion is different. At that time duels were almost unknown there. We saw from Jakuskin's experience that the challenger was simply despatched forthwith to the Caucasus. Bethsaba risked nothing more than her husband's banishment to Georgia, in the event of his challenging Galban ; for Galban was certain not to fight. At the worst, it would only lead to fist-cuffs, and there the strong-wristed country gentleman would be more than a match for the effeminate courtier.

In order that the noise of his approaching sledge might not attract attention, Pushkin left it in the road, and taking his case of pistols and whip in his hand, walked to the house.

It had a deserted appearance ; not even a dog barked in the courtyard. It was after some time that Pushkin at last succeeded in getting a dvornik to open the door in answer to his repeated knocking.

“Where is Chevalier Galban ?”

“Ah, little master, that I can't tell. He went away yesterday.”

“Tell me no lies, or you shall have a taste of my

whip! Go and tell him that some one from Pushkin's is here."

"Ah, soul of mine, you have come, then, at the right time, for the Chevalier left a letter for the Pushkins. True, he said it would be a lady who came for it; but I suppose it's all the same if I give it to you?"

So saying he drew out a letter from the leg of his boot. No matter if the scent of patchouli became slightly mixed with the smell of leather.

Pushkin, tearing open the letter, read—

"MADAME,

"I ask you ten thousand pardons; but this time it was not your heart, but your husband's head I was after. I hasten to meet him beside the lovely woman whose name is 'Scassold.'

"GALBAN."

"Drive back!" growled Pushkin to his jemsik. "Drive as hard as your horses will go to St. Petersb<sup>ü</sup>rg!"

It was too late. A day had been lost. Pushkin could not possibly arrive at the scene of action on December 26th. A woman's intrigue had succeeded admirably. If all else were lost, the poet's head was saved.

## CHAPTER L

### "DEREVASKI DALOI."

THINGS had never gone so quietly in St. Petersburg as during those three months preceding the 26th of December. Night disturbances, public-house gatherings had ceased entirely. In the kabas, instead of the daily three thousand pots of drink, not more than two hundred were given out. It is a serious outlook when the Russian people do not drink.

For five-and-twenty days Russia had been without a Regent. What had occurred during those five-and-twenty days?

The vast empire had had two heads, and two hearts. One at Warsaw, the other at St. Petersburg. In St. Petersburg, the Viceroy of Warsaw had been proclaimed Czar; in Warsaw, the Grand Duke Nicholas.

Their youngest brother, Michael, was on a visit to Constantine when the news of Alexander's death at Taganrog reached him—two days earlier than it was received at St. Petersburg. A grand gala was going on at the time, which was stopped at once on receipt of the melancholy intelligence. Constantine begged his brother to return instantly to St. Petersburg, and repeat his declaration of renunciation of the succession. The Grand Duke Michael crossed the deputation sent from St. Petersburg. At the same time that he reached the capital with his brother's fresh repudiation, Labanoff arrived at Warsaw with documents stating that Constantine had been chosen, and

containing the oaths of fealty of the army, and the people's address to him bearing a hundred thousand signatures. Every one had been required to affix his signature, on the previous Sunday, on leaving the churches ; such as could not write had their hands guided. But Johanna Grudzinska's power was still victorious. The sealed document bore the inscription : "To His Imperial Majesty."

"I know the contents," said Constantine. "I am to separate from my wife, and espouse the imperial throne. Much obliged ! This document is not addressed to me ; I am no 'Imperial Majesty.' Take it back to those who sent it."

And with seals unbroken he sent back the documents.

The Grand Duke Michael's mission met with similar success. The letter of Constantine was addressed to Czar Nicholas. He would not receive it. Constantine had already been elected ; the army had sworn allegiance to him ; the people had signed an address ; important state papers were being prepared in his name. It was unalterable.

Michael had to return once more to Warsaw, and endeavour to move Constantine. This time he met the returning deputation at Dorpat, taking back the bull with seals unbroken.

Thus Russia had no Czar. The Republicans said : "All right. If they can't settle with one, let them try with two."

Suddenly came news in St. Petersburg that a seditious rising had been detected in the Southern Army.

Now neither party could hesitate any longer. Pestel and ten leaders of battalions were arrested ; but this, far from suppressing the insurrection, only hurried it on.

Late in the evening of the 25th of December, Nicholas decided to accept the crown. This brought things to a crisis.

The manifesto of his accession was drawn up at

two o'clock in the morning ; thus could not be made public then and there. On the following morning the regiments were to swear the oath to the new Czar, without knowing what had happened to the one to whom they pledged allegiance but a fortnight before. The conspirators passed the night deliberating what should be done.

"All is ready for the war of freedom," said enthusiastic Ryleieff.

"But one thing is wanting," answered Zeneida Ilmarinen ; "and that is that the people do not know what freedom is."

"True!" said Ghedimin. "The people do not understand our views. We ought to have begun by teaching them what is freedom."

"We must begin by freeing the people from their tyrants," broke in Jakuskin, "then they will soon learn the meaning of freedom."

War was declared. The conspirators going back to their regiments took possession, with their mutinous troops, of the square in front of the Winter Palace in the mist of early morning. Their watchword was, "Derevaski daloi"—"Throw away your touchwood." In ordinary gun practice touchwood was used. Now all hastened to change this for steel and flint. Then came the cry: "Hurrah, Constantine!" Only Constantine then ; and no word of freedom ? But that had been provided for. The mutinous soldiers set up the shout : "Long live the Constitution." They had been made to believe that "Constitucia" was the wife of Grand Duke Constantine. And thus waxed enthusiastic for freedom as the Czar's wife.

Freedom itself lay deep, deep under the snow like a buried acorn, needing the rays of the sun to awaken it to vitality. On the morning of his accession, the first day of his rule, the Czar was greeted by the tumult of a revolution. They were the household troops, the crack regiments, that rose against him. Their hurrahs resounded from Czar Peter's Platz to the Winter Palace, which Nicholas had

exchanged for the little, quiet, old-fashioned Anikof Palace, where he formerly resided. Pale with terror, his generals rushed up to tell him of the danger of the rebellion. Nicholas had seen one like it before, five-and-twenty years ago. Then, a little boy, he was sleeping peacefully in his bed, when his mother suddenly rushing into the room, snatched him up in her arms, and ran the length of the dark apartments crying for help. One of the doors she was passing opened, and a pale man emerged from it. From a neighbouring room came the sounds of a furious struggle—some one within was fighting for his life. That some one was his father. The pale man, Count Pahlen, tore the mother and her trembling burden away from the scene of terror. This episode Nicholas had never forgotten. He, too, now had a little son, still slumbering in his bed. And he, too, snatching up the child in his arms, dashed with it down the stairs of the palace. But before handing over his son to the soldiers, he took his wife into the chapel. There, kneeling side by side, they swore to die in a manner worthy of rulers of the empire. That moment of terror gave the Czarina a palsied movement of the head, which she never lost in after life. Then the Czar, taking his son up in his arms, went out with him into the courtyard. The battalion on guard at the Winter Palace chanced to be of a Finnish regiment—Kalevaines—despised as Tschuds.

The new Czar, going up to them, his son in his arms, tore open his uniform, and presenting his bare breast to the bayonets, said—

"If you have cause against me—fire at my defenceless breast!"

And Pushkin was right.

The feeling of humanity is stronger than the thirst for freedom. It protects the serf when the Czar persecutes him; and protects the Czar when persecuted by the serf.

"Fear not! We will protect you!" cried Zencida's countrymen.

*"Then to you I entrust my child ; take care of him. If I fall, he is your future Czar."* And he threw his pale little successor, Alexander II., into the arms of the most heavily oppressed of all his subjects.

He knew the hearts of men. By this action he had turned their weapons from his own bosom upon his assailants.

That one Finnish battalion defended the Winter Palace from the morning to the evening against the whole Revolutionary force.

Nicholas, however, springing on his horse, dashed through the gates, followed by his generals.

In front of the palace surged a dense mass of the lowest of the low, roaring out the "Song of the Knife"—its harvest time had come. Riding into their very midst, Nicholas said—

"What are you doing here, dear children? This is no place for you."

The people looked at one another.

"Eh! He is a kind man! He calls us his dear children ; and tells us so kindly to go away from here. Let's go home!"

And they dispersed.

Outside the Admiralty he was received by some well-affected battalions. At their head he marched to the vast Peter's Platz, where was the insurgents' camp. One-half of the square was occupied by them ; the other half by the troops loyal to him. Betwixt the opposing armies was the colossal statue on its granite pedestal, with hands outstretched, no one knows whether to command or bless. One party of insurgents stormed the castle on the other side of the frozen Neva ; the other pressed on towards the gates of the Winter Palace. Nicholas wandering, meanwhile, undecidedly up and down the great square, weighing on which cast of the die hung the fate of his imperial house and empire. He had first endeavoured by every means in his power to avoid the conflict—had sent the most popular leader of the army, General Miloradovics, to parley with the

insurgents, and move them to submission. A ball had struck him from his horse before he could speak ; it was Kakovski who had shot him. The heroic general died in the Czar's arms. Then he had sent the highest Church dignitary of the country, the metropolitan Seraphim, in full canonicals, to parley with his enemies.

What cared they now for priests. Seizing the venerable man by his snow-white beard, they had roared in his ears—

" If you are a priest, read your breviary, and don't meddle to your hurt in military matters ! "

The insurgents received unexpected support. The marines, and half the grenadier regiments, joined them. Their numbers grew and grew ; the square echoed with the cry, " Long live the Constitution ! "

Then the Czar himself rode up to them. The rebels saw him coming. It was a temptation to them to see him ride up unattended. A cavalry officer galloped up to him, a loaded pistol in his hand.

" What is your business ? " the Czar asked, threateningly, as he came near. There was such a spell in his cold look, that the foolhardy man, hiding his face, turned away his head and galloped back.

It was only by force that his followers could tear the Czar away from the scene of revolt.

It began to grow dusk.

The armies of Gog and Magog went on ever increasing, and darkness added its terrors to the rest. With night, axe and knife would begin their work ; seventy thousand mujiks would decide who should be Russia's future ruler !

The generals entreated the Czar to give the signal to attack. He still hesitated. First, he tried to disperse the insurgents by means of a feigned attack upon the square of the enemy, and gave the Horse Guards orders to this effect. They were received by a salvo of artillery, and the Horse Guards retreated decimated. At that critical moment drums beating

to attack were heard advancing from Morskoje Street, and Grand Duke Michael appeared at the head of the Moscow regiment. He had just returned from Moscow, and hastily summoning those of his own regiment who had remained faithful to him, advanced against the rebels, and the fight began.

The noisiest of the insurgents, the heroes of the "Bear's Paw," cleared out of the square at the first volley; the soldiers alone stood fire. The heroes of freedom fought heroically. The poor soldier, however, who fell without knowing why or wherefore, perhaps learned in his death agony that she for whom he had fallen was a living goddess, who in some future time would make his descendants happy —the goddess of Freedom.

Until late in the night they held the square, and repulsed the attacks of the imperial troops.

Then, in the deep darkness, a division of artillery suddenly approached up Nevski-Prospect. This broad, radial street opens in such a manner on to the great square, which lies between the Admiralty, the Winter Palace, and Isaac Cathedral, that it commands both sides of the square.

The fire of the approaching cannon might as easily be directed against the Czar's army as against the rebels' camp; and nearly all the officers in the artillery were in league with the insurgents! They were received by the latter with cheers as they unlimbered their guns at the corner of the street. Of course, they had come to the aid of the rebel army! At that critical moment Grand Duke Michael, dashing up to the foremost gun, snatched the fuse from the gunner's hand, sighted on to the mass of the insurgents, and the first thunder of cannon belched forth into their ranks a fire of destructive grape.

That first cannon-shot decided the fate of the day, and of the epoch. Others followed. The whole division turned their destroying force upon the insurgent army.

## CHAPTER LI.

### NAMELESS WIFE OF A NAMELESS MAN.

BUT, meanwhile, what had become of the Dictator—the leader—the active spirit of the whole movement? He had been seeking all day for a man he could not find—himself.

The task he had undertaken was neither suited to him physically nor morally. At the very first step he had become conscious of the awful chasm into which the whole affair he had undertaken must drag him and all concerned in it.

Instead of an enthusiastic people, excited to heroic resolves by the baptism of fire, he found a mob of soldiers, fooled by the pretext that their leaders wanted to steal away from them their former Czar, whom, by the way, they hated, but to whom they had sworn allegiance; a senseless band of soldiery clamouring for "Constitucia," whom they believed to be the wife of the Czar! What would be the consequence, did they gain the victory to-day? Tomorrow some new lie must be fabricated for them, that they might not find out that it was Freedom for which they had fought. What was Hecuba to them, they to Hecuba? What had Freedom and Life Guards in common with each other? How would "Constitucia" better their condition?

True, their commanding officers had promised them that "Constitucia" would double their monthly pay; but the people must be doubly taxed if the soldiers

were to get double pay. Is that freedom? And what would ensue if he, for whom they had been fighting, Constantine, were to come amongst them? Might he not come from Warsaw at the head of the army he had brought with him, and say, "You wanted me, here I am. The constitution I bring with me is not my wife, but a stout stick!" What would follow then?

And the people? These poor wretches resigned to rags and misery, working day by day to keep body and soul together. Seventy thousand mujiks, representatives of the oppressed of the four corners of the earth—not the Russian people, but the dregs of all imaginable Slav races—Finnish, Lithuanian, Lapp, and Wallachian—who do not speak each other's tongues, who are only united by their common misery. And their leaders? A set of runaway French adventurers. What do they understand by Freedom? The wrecking of a brandy store, or plundering of palaces and shops! A mutinous word sets them on fire like straw, and a charge of grape shot scatters them like chaff before the wind.

His soul could find no guiding thought. He went hither and thither, and could rest on no single idea. In the course of his wanderings he came upon Ryleieff, in whose face were reflected his own feelings. The poet sadly grasped his hand.

"The time was not ripe!" he whispered in his ear, and hurried away.

In another street he met Colonel Bulatoff in mufti. Bulatoff had been chosen as military leader of the rebellion—and here was he, going about in frock coat and tall hat. They did not wish to recognize each other, so passed hurriedly by, one on one side, the other on the opposite side of the street.

Less than all had he courage to go to Zeneida's palace. He dreaded more to look into her face than into the mouth of a cannon. She defied danger; whilst he, who had dragged her into it, fled from it. At last, however, he could no longer delay seeking

## NAMELESS WIFE OF A NAMELESS MAN

her. He must cross Moika bridge. But the toll-keepers would see him; the canal was frozen, so descending the steps of the stone quay, Ghedimin prepared to cross the ice in order to reach the other side.

Scarce had he gone two steps before he heard his name whispered from behind. Startled, he turned. From under one of the arches peeped a well-known face, that of Duke Odojefski, a bloodthirsty braggart, who but that morning would have mown men down right and left; now all his courage had oozed out, and he was hiding under the arch of a bridge!

"Don't venture near Zeneida's! Her palace is surrounded!" whispered he, and crept back into his hiding-place.

What a sight! Odojefski in hiding! The colonel, whose battalion is even now fighting on Isaacsplatz; the duke, whose palace is among the grandest of the capital, whose family name is renowned in history, who himself has claimed a place between Brutus and Riego—in hiding behind a snow-drift! And what is he about there? Smearing his face with a stick of caustic, to render himself unrecognizable.

Ghedimin lost his head completely. Turning back by the other bank, he hurried home. There arrived, he wrote on a visiting card, "I entreat you, for Heaven's sake, to come across to my grandmother's house. I have important secrets to confide to you."

This card he sent up by his house-porter to Korynthia. He himself then repaired to his grandmother's. It was his last refuge.

Without it was already night; the roar of cannon did not cease. The watch-fires were the only lights in the imperial capital.

Good old Anna Feodorovna was still alive among her fortune-telling cards, her purring cats, and her faithful Ihnasko, with whom she counted the days still remaining before the New Year.

## THE EVEN BOOK.

"Another New Year! What will it bring with it?  
Who will live through it?"

It is the day after Christmas Day. If two tapers of equal length are lighted on that evening, one can tell who will die first, the husband or the wife, by seeing whose taper is the first to burn out.

This time it was the wife's taper.

"Well, God's will be done!" sighed the old woman. "If I must go first. And it is time; I have lived long enough! But I cannot but pity the poor old man, whose life will be so lonely without me. He must not be told that I am dead. Let him think I am still alive. And see that every birthday and name-day he gets one of the red night-caps I always give him. Do you hear, Ihuasko?"

"Oh, don't keep on talking so much about dying, your Highness," ejaculated the old man, with chattering teeth. "All my bones are shaking without that, from the thunder of those cannons."

"Because you are a coward; and because you have never been a soldier. The idea of being frightened at the sound of cannon that are only inviting people to join the great Christmas procession! The Czar is now giving a gala banquet to the court, and a display of fireworks to the people. Do you hear those reports? They are rockets. Now the great set piece is going off! And when six such volleys are fired, one after another, it means that the Czar is raising his glass for a toast. Oho! how often have I attended such festivities—not one took place without my presence. Ah, I was beautiful as a young woman, and my voice was musical as silver. Czar Paul was constantly asking me to sing him his favourite song—'When by Evening's Latest Rays.' It is a pretty song still. But I have no one now to sing

"moment came some one who liked to  
try a song.  
the 'Lord of all!'" cried Anna







